FLESHING OUT CHRIST: ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE SCRIPTURAL INCARNATION OF THE WORD

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
History of Christianity
at the University of Edinburgh
2016

DECLARATION

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores and analyzes Origen of Alexandria's conviction that Scripture is itself the enfleshed Christ, or that "in the Scriptures the Word became flesh that he might tabernacle among us" (*Philoc* 15.19). For Origen, Scripture as the "Word of the Lord" is identical to the Word who was "with God," and who "was God" in the Johannine Prologue. The Word assumes flesh not only in his birth, but also through the words and phrases of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. As a result, many scholars have noted the interesting "parallel" or "analogy" Origen draws between Scripture and the Incarnation, but this study provides the first comprehensive and focused treatment of Scripture *as* incarnate Word in Origen's work. Ultimately, it demonstrates that for Origen, biblical interpretation is nothing less than a direct noetic encounter with the person of Christ, allowing the reader to know him in any time or place, to see him transfigured in the movement from the letter to the spirit, and even to consume his flesh and blood. Following an introductory chapter, the project consists of two parts. Part One (Chapters Two and Three) addresses the nature of "scriptural flesh" in Origen's work. Chapter Two seeks to articulate what it means for the Word to become "flesh" in the first place, as well as what is required to "lift the veil" and perceive that flesh as divine. By examining the role of the cross in Origen's Christology, it demonstrates that it is only in light of the Passion, through the lens of the *crucified* Christ, that the divinity of both man (Jesus) and text (Scripture) is made manifest. Chapter Three looks to define this scriptural "flesh" in Origen's thought, specifically by relying on the doctrine of the *epinoiai* (the "aspects" or biblical titles of Christ). It is the *epinoiai* that clothe

Christ and give him shape through the text. Part Two (Chapters Four and Five) addresses the theological and spiritual implications for the reader and interpreter of Scripture. Chapter Four examines the "coming of Christ" (*parousia*) as an individualized noetic phenomenon, brought about by the Christological reading of Scripture in any time or place. Finally, Chapter Five addresses the consumption of Christ through the Scriptures, which turns out to be much more about hermeneutics than about sacramental theology. A short conclusion follows, raising some of the broader implications for Origen studies as well as for the study of early Christian biblical exegesis.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations for the works of Origen are taken from: John McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004). All scriptural abbreviations in this thesis are taken from Kate L. Turabian, et al., *A Manuel for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

The Works of Origen

CCels	*Against Celsus* (*Contra Celsum*)
ComCt	*Commentary on the Song of Songs*
ComJn	*Commentary on John*
ComMt	*Commentary on Matthew*
ComRm	*Commentary on Romans*
DialHer	*Dialogue with Heraclides*
FragmLc	*Fragments on Luke*
HomGn	*Homilies on Genesis*
HomEx	*Homilies on Exodus*
HomLev	*Homilies on Leviticus*
HomNum	*Homilies on Numbers*
HomJos	*Homilies on Joshua*
HomJd	*Homilies on Judges*
HomCt	*Homilies on the Song of Songs*
HomJr	*Homilies on Jeremiah*
HomEz	*Homilies on Ezekiel*
HomLc	*Homilies on Luke*
PArch	*Peri archon* (*On First Principles*)
PEuch	*On Prayer*
Philoc	*The Philocalia of Origen*
PPasch	*On Pascha*
SerMt	*Series of Commentaries on Matthew*

General Abbreviations

ACT	Ancient Christian Texts
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality
EH	Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*
FC	Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina
SC	Sources chrétiennes

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the second century, on the road to his eventual martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius, the captive bishop of Antioch, wrote seven letters of supreme value for our present knowledge of early Christian thought and practice. Five letters were directed to various churches in Asia Minor, one was sent ahead to Rome, and one was dispatched to Ignatius' friend Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. While these letters are remembered for many things, including the light they shed on early ecclesiastical polity, their condemnation of "docetic" and Judaizing theology, and the zealous enthusiasm for suffering they depict, there is one passage in the *Letter to the Philadelphians* that stands out for a different reason. In the midst of exhorting the Philadelphians to do nothing in a spirit of contentiousness, "but rather by the teaching of Christ," Ignatius recalls a debate he has had with an unspecified party about the source and authority of that teaching. He writes:

> Certain people declared in my hearing, "Unless I can find a thing in our ancient records [ἀρχεῖα], I refuse to believe it in the Gospel"; and when I assured them that it is indeed in the ancient scriptures, they retorted, "That has got to be proved." But for my part, my records are Jesus Christ; for me, the sacrosanct records are his cross and death and resurrection, and the faith that comes through him. And it is by these, and by the help of your prayers, that I am hoping to be justified.[1]

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[1] Ignatius, *Philadelphians* 8.2; trans. Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth, *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 95. Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς μηδὴν κατ' ἐρίθειαν πράσσειν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ χριστομαθίαν. ἐπεὶ ἤκουσά τινων λεγόντων ὅτι Ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἀρχείοις εὕρω ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ οὐ πιστεύω· καὶ λέγοντός μου αὐτοῖς ὅτι Γέγραπται, ἀπεκρίθησάν μοι ὅτι Πρόκειται. ἐμοὶ δὲ ἀρχεῖά ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς, τὰ ἄθικτα ἀρχεῖα ὁ σταυρὸς αὐτου καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ πίστις ἡ δι' αὐτου· ἐν οἷς θέλω ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ ὑμῶν δικαιωθῆναι. Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 242.

Ignatius does not attempt to prove the truth of the gospel by appealing to historical context, prophecy, or even apostolic authority. Rather, he states with almost baffling simplicity that the ancient Scriptures *are* Jesus Christ.[2] The claim appears surprising. How can the text be a person? Is this merely an attempt on the part of Ignatius to bypass the intellectual toil of constructing a real argument? Some have certainly said so.

William Schoedel, for example, suggests that the Philadelphians were challenging the bishop's *authority* by questioning his ability to find what he needed in the Old Testament. They were more exegetically adept than he, though not more theologically adept, and their "preoccupation with Scripture prevented them from keeping Christ in the center of the theological stage to his satisfaction."[3] As a result, argues Schoedel, Ignatius appealed to "an even higher authority," but was "much less skillful than writers like the authors of Hebrews or *Barnabas*" in actually finding

[2] The term, ἀρχεῖα, is admittedly an unusual designation for Scripture. For this reason, in the 1920s S. Reinach and E. Petersen argued that Ignatius was referring to actual city archives, while Johannes Klevinghaus later suggested that the term describes certain Jewish-Gnostic gospels to which Ignatius was *opposing* the Scriptures. However, such objections have largely been put to rest, particularly through the work of William Schoedel. Schoedel's argument in favor of understanding the "ancient records" as equivalent to what we now refer to as the Old Testament rests upon three pieces of evidence: (1) a parallel passage in Josephus' *Contra Apionem* (1.29) where he directly equates the Hebrew Scriptures with the "public records" (δημοσίαι ἀναγραφαί) of the Greeks and other Ancient Near Eastern civilizations (1.20–22; 1.28), explicitly describing those of the Phoenicians as "archives" (1.143); (2) the fact that Ignatius replies, "It is written," which he only uses in relation to Scripture (*Ephesians* 5.3; *Magnesians* 12); and (3) the fact that it is the Philadelphians who emphasize the authority of the ancient Scriptures in *Philadelphians* 5.1–2 and 9.1, and Ignatius seems to be staking a claim on their own territory in the passage above. For more on this, see Solomon Reinach, "Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, and the ARXEIA," in *Anatolian Studies Presented to Sir William Mitchell Ramsay*, ed. W. H. Buckler and W. M. Calder (Manchester: Manchester University, 1923), 339–40; Erik Peterson, *ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 24 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926); William R. Schoedel, "Ignatius and the Archives," *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978): 97–106; William R. Schoedel, *A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 208–9.

[3] Schoedel, *A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, 209.

passages to support his position.[4] Schoedel's answer is entirely plausible, but not at all satisfying.

More recently, John O'Keefe and R. R. Reno have argued that something else is going on in this passage. They suggest that while Ignatius' critics believe him to be imposing something upon the text that is not there, his response is simply that it is there, and that anyone who *knows* Christ will recognize it. That is, Ignatius is stating that Christ is the "interpretive key," and "to know him is to know the content of the scriptures."[5] Christ, his cross, his death, and his resurrection provide the proper hermeneutical lens through which to understand the Scriptures. Such an explanation would make Ignatius' claim far less unusual in the broader spectrum of patristic thought, but while it is more satisfying than Schoedel's, it does not go far enough.

Problematically, Schoedel, as well as O'Keefe and Reno, have provided explanations that attempt to "get around" Ignatius' actual statement: "the archives *are* Jesus Christ." But rather than rejecting the notion that Ignatius means to equate the Scriptures with a person, perhaps we ought to take his statement at face value. Scripture is Christ, period. By accepting this view, we can see that Ignatius is far less concerned with whether the "ancient scriptures" appropriately demonstrate the validity of his teaching (either through historical or theological precedent), and is much more concerned with the fact that the Scriptures are themselves the divine Word, the revelation of the Father. For Ignatius, that divine Word is of course none other than Christ.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 28.

In an earlier portion of their book (without reference to Ignatius), O'Keefe and Reno compellingly argue that patristic thinkers did not hold primarily to what is called a "referential theory of meaning." That is, unlike modern readers, they did not assume "that our words and sentences are meaningful insofar as they successfully refer or point," specifically to a set of historical events or theological truths beyond them.[6] Though the Scriptures do speak of real historical events, real theological truths, and real moral commandments, the primary interest of the Fathers was Scripture itself, *as* divine revelation:

> Treated as a whole, the Bible absorbed their attention rather than directing it elsewhere, either to the events to which the text refers or the divine truths to which it points. Scripture was the magnetic pole of their thought. In this way, the fathers differ from modern readers, not in any particular assumption about a verse or episode, or in any specific method, but in their overall assumptions. Modern readers assume that the Bible means by accurately referring to an *x*, whether event, mode of consciousness, or theological truth. For the fathers, the Bible is the array of words, sentences, laws, images, episodes, and narratives that does not acquire meaning because of its connection to an *x*; it confers meaning because it *is* divine revelation. Scripture is ordained by God to edify, and that power of edification is intrinsic to Scripture.[7]

The thesis of O'Keefe and Reno is ambitious, and while they may overstate their case (surely early Christian writers *also* attributed great importance to the realities behind the words, and those realities *also* give the text meaning), their claim is nonetheless compelling. Indeed, when applied to Ignatius, we must take that claim one step further.

In line with the above, it may be that Ignatius does not perceive the ancient

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[6] Ibid., 8. In their own words, a referential theory of meaning presumes that "one should adopt reading techniques that help one proceed from what the text says to what it seeks to represent. Reading is an act of movement from understanding the words to comprehending the facts and events (the empiricist preference) or ideas and experiences (the phenomenological preference) that the words seek to communicate. To use a spatial metaphor, a referential theory of meaning encourages us to read out of the text and toward the true subject matter to which it seeks to refer." Ibid., 9.

[7] Ibid., 11–12.

Scriptures to be valuable or truthful *primarily* because of what they do or do not explicitly refer to. He perceives them as such primarily because they *are* Jesus Christ. And, entering into the realm of speculation, it may be that he perceives them to be Jesus Christ not because of their status as "divine revelation," to borrow the phraseology of Reno and O'Keefe, but because they are pure divine Word (Logos). That is, Scripture is itself the very same divine Word who was "with God," who "was God," and who "became flesh" (Jn 1:1, 14).[8] It is Christ. Their identity is one and the same, and for this reason above all, "Scripture was the magnetic pole of [patristic] thought." It is a "who" rather than a "what," and its interpretation becomes a direct encounter with the person of Jesus.

Reading this kind of Logos theology into Ignatius' work is admittedly speculative, but it is not unwarranted. In fact, as we shall come to see in great detail, it was directly picked up by a much more prolific and controversial writer born in the very same century: Origen of Alexandria.[9]

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[8] A position taken in passing by John Behr in *The Way to Nicaea*, vol. 1, Formation of Christian Theology (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 87–88. Unless otherwise noted, or unless they occur within another quotation, all scriptural quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

[9] The ongoing debate regarding the authenticity and date of Ignatius' letters is a fascinating one, but it need not be rehashed here. The range of possibilities is nearly all set prior to the time of Origen (c.185–254), or at least prior to his written work. Those who accept the middle recension as genuine and who trust the account of Eusebius (*EH* 3.36), tend to place the letters within the reign of Trajan (AD 98–117), or sometimes Hadrian (AD 117–138), while those who do not rarely date them later than the latter half of the second century. In either event, the theology of the letters predates Origen's own, and he demonstrates direct knowledge of them by quoting *Ephesians* 19.1 in his sixth *Homily on Luke* (6.4). For a small sampling of scholarship on the question of authenticity/dating, see A. Harnack, *Die Zeit des Ignatius und die Chronologie der Antiochenischen Bischöfe bis Tyrannus nach Julius Africanus und den späteren Historikern* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrischs, 1878); J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 328–430; R. Joly, *Le dossier d'Ignace d'Antioche* (Brussels: Éditions de l'université, 1979); W. R. Schoedel, "Are the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch Authentic?," *Religious Studies Review* 6 (1980): 196–201; Reinhard M. Hübner, "Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochien," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 1.1 (1997): 44–72; Mark J. Edwards, "Ignatius and the Second Century: An Answer to R. Hübner," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 2.1 (1998): 16–25; Timothy D. Barnes, "The Date of Ignatius," *Expository Times* 120, no. 3 (2008): 119–30.

Topic and Thesis

Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–254)[10] was a philosopher, catechist, textual critic, exegete, preacher, traveler, and confessor. The eldest of seven sons,[11] he was born in Alexandria, the great center of Hellenistic learning, to a father who would be imprisoned and beheaded for his faith.[12] His fervent hunger for knowledge and his natural intellectual ability saw him become a catechist by the age of seventeen,[13] as well as a student of Ammonius Saccas, teacher of the renowned Plotinus.[14] His

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[10] By way of introduction, I present here only a broad overview of the life of Origen, listing events that are not heavily disputed. His full biography has been written many times over, and it need not be repeated here in full. For the most comprehensive (and speculative) account, see Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre*, Christianisme Antique 1 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977). For more succinct treatments in English, see Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 1–36; and John McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 1–23. Every modern biography of Origen is forced to rely heavily upon the sixth book of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (*EH*), which provides the most thorough ancient account of Origen's life. Though Eusebius is heavily biased in Origen's favor, and though his own chronology of events is occasionally inconsistent, his narrative has been cautiously accepted by modern biographers as more trustworthy than not. Furthermore, many of the events described can be cross-examined with other extant sources, such as the *Address of Thanksgiving to Origen* (attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus), Pamphilus' *Apology for Origen*, portions of Origen's *Letter to Friends in Alexandria* (preserved by both Jerome and Rufinus), the later *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates, and the extremely biased *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis. The most difficult part of constructing a timeline for Origen's life is dating his individual works. For the present study, rather than constructing a comprehensive timeline or fully endorsing the work of a single scholar, I will comment on dating or chronology only as the need arises. As for the dates of Origen's life (AD 185–254), Eusebius informs us that he was "still in his seventeenth year" during the persecution of the Emperor Septimius Severus, which took place in AD 202 (*EH* 6.2), and that he died at age 69 during the reign of Gallus (AD 251–53), though the numbers indicate it was actually early in the reign of Valerian (*EH* 7.1).

[11] Eusebius, *EH* 6.2.

[12] Ibid., 6.1–2.

[13] Ibid., 6.3.

[14] Ibid., 6.19. This point is occasionally disputed. Eusebius includes in his history an excerpt of a treatise against Christians written by Porphyry, famous student of Plotinus, where Porphyry describes Origen as "a pupil of Ammonius, the most distinguished philosopher of our time." Porphyry maintains that Origen abandoned Greek thought in favor of Christianity, whereas Ammonius had been raised as a Christian but rejected the faith "when he began to think philosophically." Eusebius disputes both points, insisting that both Origen and Ammonius clung to the Christian principles of their parents

meteoric rise as a Christian intellectual brought him pupils from every corner of the empire,[15] the fierce envy of his own bishop, Demetrius,[16] and even the admiration of the Emperor's mother, Julia Mamaea.[17] Travelling to Rome, Athens, Arabia, and Palestine, he wrote, preached, and served as a presbyter[18] and arbiter of orthodox teaching.[19] He moved to Caesarea, founded a *schola*, and helped to build what would become one of the world's greatest libraries.[20] Before his death, he was captured, chained, and stretched upon the rack under the brutal reign of the emperor Decius.[21] All the while, he composed somewhere in the range of eight hundred to two thousand volumes of exegetical and theological value.[22] He was unquestionably the greatest Christian thinker of his age.

But of course, this was not always the prevalent view of Origen's legacy. Some in his own lifetime viewed him with skepticism and concern. By the time of the Origenist controversies in the fifth and sixth centuries, the imperial decree of

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from childhood onward. The confusion has led to speculation that there is more than one Ammonius, as well as more than one Origen, with various combinations of influence proposed. See Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 259–60.

[15] Ibid., 6.30.

[16] Ibid., 6.8, 19.

[17] Ibid., 6.21.

[18] Ibid., 6.23.

[19] Ibid., 6.33, 37.

[20] Ibid., 6.32, 36.

[21] Ibid., 6.39.

[22] Nautin proposes about seventy-seven actual titles in *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre*, 241–60. The number given has varied dramatically. According to Jerome, Eusebius counted just under 2,000 treatises (*Adv. Rufinum* 2.22), whereas Epiphanius listed 6,000 (*Adv. Haer*. 64.63). Epiphanius, however, was likely counting separate scrolls as individual titles. Jerome himself lists 800 (*Epist*. 33; see Crouzel, *Origen*, 37–39).

Justinian to destroy his books (AD 543), and the harsh judgment of the Second Council of Constantinople (AD 553), his image had been permanently altered.[23] Over the centuries, he was seen as a mad allegorist, a corrupting Platonist, and an advocate of heterodox teachings like the preexistence of souls, *apokatastasis*, and the redemption of Satan. Only in recent times has there been a deliberate scholarly effort to sort through the centuries of hearsay and vilification in order to rediscover the "real Origen," for better or worse.[24] As it turned out, some of the accusations held weight, some were greatly exaggerated, and some were patently false. Others are still being worked out. But the single greatest revelation that emerged from this search was the realization that Origen was, first and foremost, an interpreter of *Scripture*. Over time, this gave way to more charitable readings of Origen. He was no longer seen as the great speculative theologian, but as the great exegete of the early church.[25] Even prior to this rediscovery, Adolf von Harnack declared, "There has never been a theologian in the church who was, and desired to be, so exclusively a biblical interpreter as Origen."[26]

But why? Why did he so desire to be an interpreter of the Bible? As a boy, what led him to "worry his father with questions as to the meaning and intention that

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[23] The best account of this remains Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[24] We will examine these efforts in the literature review to follow.

[25] Though as John Behr points out, "such a contrast would not have been intelligible for Origen, for whom all theological reflection is ultimately exegetical in character." *Way to Nicaea*, 169.

[26] *Der kirchengeschichtliche Ertag der exegetischen Arbeiten des Origenes*, vol. 2, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 42.4 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1919), 2.4 A3.

underlay the inspired Scripture,"[27] and as a man to devote "most of the night to the study of Holy Scripture"?[28] Why did he dedicate nearly all his time to writing commentaries and preaching homilies on its many books? By the account of his own contemporaries, he possessed a vision of the Scriptures that overwhelmingly drew others to them as well. His student, Theodore (known later as Gregory the Wonderworker), describes Origen's influence on him like this:

> It was like a spark falling in our deepest soul, setting it on fire, making it burst into flame within us. It was, at the same time, a love for the Holy Word, the most beautiful object of all that, by its ineffable beauty, attracts all things to itself with irresistible force, and it was also love for this man, the friend and advocate of the Holy Word.[29]

In other words, to love Origen was to love Scripture. His dedication to it was contagious, and his vision of it inspiring. But what was that vision?

In the broadest sense, this thesis seeks to answer that question, but to do so through the examination of a single theme: the scriptural enfleshment of Christ. Like Ignatius of Antioch, Origen believes that Scripture *is* Christ, but unlike Ignatius, there is no ambiguity of meaning. He unequivocally declares, "For always in the Scriptures the Logos became flesh that he might tabernacle among us" (ἀεὶ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς ὁ λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο, ἵνα κατασκηνώςῃ ἐν ἡμῖν).[30] For Origen, the

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[27] *EH* 6.2.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Panegyric* 6. Trans. John McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 18.

[30] *Philoc* 15.19, trans. mine. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Origen are those of the major English editions, listed in the bibliography. For the Greek text, I will rely on the *Sources Chrétiennes* series (also listed there). Where there is no SC edition, I will indicate the source. The line above is found in chapter fifteen of the *Philocalia of Origen*, a compilation of Origen's writings by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus (see Gregory's *Ep*. 115). The whole of chapter fifteen is taken from *Contra Celsus*. However, 15.19 curiously does not appear in Vatican, gr. 386, the thirteenth-century manuscript of *Contra Celsus* from which all other existing manuscripts are derived, making the *Philocalia* the only source for this particular line. However, R. P. C. Hanson has

very same Word who was "with God" and "was God" assumed flesh in the words and phrases of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. In this thesis, I will argue that this notion is not limited to a few obscure statements, nor is it an interesting but secondary insight. Rather, it is ubiquitous throughout his written work, manifesting itself in a multitude of ways and informing the whole of his theology and exegetical methodology. As we shall see, Scripture's *primary* task is not to "refer," though it certainly does refer. For Origen, biblical interpretation is a direct encounter with the person of Christ, and is thus itself at the very center of the spiritual life. To read the text is to encounter a person, or a "who." It is to know the incarnate Word in any time or place. It is even to consume his flesh and blood.

Before continuing on with this theme, however, let us venture into the broad field of existing literature on the subject of Origen and Scripture, in order to better situate the contribution of the present study.

Approaches to the Study of Origen and Scripture

Overview

In the study of early Christian exegesis, few figures are as popular as Origen. The approaches to the study of Origen and Scripture are numerous, and the conclusions diverse. In one recent study, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Peter Martens helpfully divides these various approaches into four foci. The first, and oldest, centers on Origen's "procedural movement, explicating the

convincingly demonstrated that the passage is almost certainly original to Origen. Furthermore, in the sixteenth century, at least one leaf disappeared from the second book of Vatican, gr. 386, and it has been tampered with elsewhere since at least the fourteenth century. See R. P. C. Hanson, "The Passage Marked 'Unde?' in Robinson's *Philocalia* XV 19", in *Origeniana Secunda*, ed. H. Crouzel and A. Quacquarelli (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1980), 293–303.

principles of literary analysis that surface in his work."[31] This approach tends to examine Origen's use of allegory in particular, often either leveling sharp criticisms against it by way of comparison with Greco-Roman interpretive methodology or philosophy, or vigorously defending its usefulness by attempting to demonstrate its distinctly Christian character.[32] It seeks to understand *how* Origen interprets Scripture, moving from a literal sense to a non-literal sense, or from the literal sense to multiple non-literal senses. The second approach focuses on Origen's doctrine of Scripture: "Here questions about his views of Scripture's divine and human authorship (i.e., inspiration), its message, and multiple senses shape the inquiry."[33] Rather than focusing on the movement between senses, this approach tends to examine the number of senses in the first place, their theological and anthropological origins, and their precise definitions. Third are the numerous topical studies that seek

[31] Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2. See Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit: L'Intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950), trans. A. E. Nash and J. Merriell, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007) 159–336; Robert Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit* (London: SPCK, 1957), 93–104; Winfried Gruber, *Die Pneumatische Exegese bei den Alexandrinern: Ein Beitrag zur Noematik der Heiligen Schrift* (Graz: Akademische Druckund Verlagsanstalt, 1957); R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1959; reprint with introduction by J. W. Trigg in Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 233–356; Robert Grant, *The Earliest Lives of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1961), 50–78; Rolf Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1963), 39–119; Jean Pépin, *Mythe et Allégorie: Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1976), 453ff; Bernhard Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhard, 1987); Mark Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 123–58; Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 22–132.

[32] For the former see especially Eugène de Faye, *Origen and His Work*, trans. Fred Rothwell (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926; reprint in Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011); Hanson, *Allegory and Event.* The best known example of the latter is undoubtedly de Lubac's *Histoire et Esprit*.

[33] Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 3. See August Zöllig, *Die Inspirationslehre des Origenen: Ein Beitrag zur Dogmengeschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1902); de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 190–222, 396–406; Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 187–310; Gögler, *Zur Theologie des Biblischen Wortes*, 244–389; Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 108–24; Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

to explain how Origen understands a particular passage, book, or theme within Scripture.[34] And the fourth "attends to the instrumental character of interpretation, assessing how his exegesis implemented a particular concern or agenda."[35] A prime example is Karen Torjesen's highly influential book, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*, which posits that the interpretation of Scripture "is determined by Origen's doctrine of the journey of the soul and by his concern for the progress of his hearers toward perfection."[36] That is, scriptural interpretation is the *means* by which the audience journeys toward God. It is the path of salvation.

Of course, these four approaches overlap considerably. Studies on the number of interpretive senses, for example, generally tend to address the method of movement between the senses as well, and the third approach, examining Origen's interpretation of a specific biblical passage or theme, can hardly remain detached from the first. They should therefore be understood loosely, but they provide a helpful map for those who wish to venture through the labyrinth of modern Origen

[34] For a small sample of the numerous articles and essays, see John Neeb, "Origen's Interpretation of Genesis 28:12 and the Rabbis," in *Origeniana Sexta* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1995), 71–80; Ruth Clements, "Teleios Amomos: The Influence of Palestinian Jewish Exegesis on the Interpretation of Exodus 12:5 in Origen's *Peri Pascha*," in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 285–311; Judith Kovacs, "Echoes of Valentinian Exegesis in Clement of Alexandria and Origen: The Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3, 1–3," in *Origeniana Octava* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 317–29; Lorenzo Perrone, "'The Bride at the Crossroads': Origen's Dramatic Interpretation of the Song of Songs," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 82, no. 1 (April 2006): 69–102; Riemer Roukema, "Origen's Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15," in *Gelitten—Gestorben—Auferstanden* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 329–42; Anders–Christian Jacobsen, "Allegorical Interpretation of Geography in Origen's Homilies on the Book of Joshua," *Religion & Theology* 17, no. 3–4 (January 2010): 289–301; Dominika A. Kurek-Chomycz, "Scenting the Aroma of Christ: 2 Corinthians 2:15–6 in Origen's Interpretation," vol. 44, Studia Patristica (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), 275–79.

[35] Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 4.

[36] Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 70. See also Dively Lauro, *Soul and Spirit of Scripture*.

scholarship, and a broad overview for those who do not. In what follows, we will delve further into these various approaches by surveying a handful of key voices and prominent themes in the study of Origen and Scripture, such as the alleged "arbitrary" nature of Origen's exegesis (approaches one and two), the instrumental nature of Scripture and its ability to perfect the hearer (approaches one and four), and the identity and purpose of the biblical interpreter (a subset of approach four). At the end, we will return to the theme of the present study (approach two), Origen's perception of Scripture as the incarnate Word of God.

The "Arbitrary" Nature of Origen's Exegesis

Eugène de Faye

The question of Origen's subjectivity has spilled more ink than any other, and one of the most outspokenly critical early twentieth-century voices was that of Eugène de Faye. In 1925, in a series of public lectures at the University of Upsala (later published as *Origen and His Works*, 1926), de Faye scorned Origen's interpretive methodology as merely the unwarranted imposition of Platonic philosophy upon a text meant to be interpreted via historical-grammatical means. In his estimation, Origen dismisses the literal meaning of the text and ignores the historical circumstances of the authors. He forces his own philosophy upon Scripture in an attempt to make Scripture support that philosophy. For this reason, de Faye writes, "It must be recognized that Origen is a Christian philosopher who imagines he is explaining the Scriptures, whereas he is really exploiting them on behalf of his own dogmatic teaching."[37] Origen "discovers in the Holy Book his own teaching on

[37] De Faye, *Origen and His Work*, 38.

God and providence, his Christological doctrine, his doctrine on the origin and end of the Cosmos, on sin and redemption; in short, an entire system of 'dogmas' of which the sacred author never dreamt."[38] For de Faye, Origen's exegesis is entirely subjective. He looks into the text and sees himself. Furthermore, because allegory is the means by which Origen imposes his supposed Hellenistic philosophy, de Faye sees allegory itself as the problem: "The allegorical meaning is the only one he takes into account. If the literal sense of the Bible is upheld, he cannot possibly read his theology into it."[39]

De Faye treats Origen's interpretive methodology on a rather superficial level, but his work articulates in brief and simple terms the concerns and frustrations that theologians have felt about Origen throughout the centuries. Is Origen a Christian first, or a philosopher first? Is he able to subdue his Platonist tendencies enough to accurately interpret Scripture? Does Scripture form his philosophy, or does his philosophy form the way he understands Scripture? While de Faye was not the first to voice such apprehensions, his critical evaluation played a part in the more sympathetic readings of Origen that would soon follow.

Henri de Lubac

Since its publication in 1950, Henri de Lubac's *Histoire et Esprit: L'Intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* has perhaps cast the greatest shadow over Origen scholarship. Initially, de Lubac's work appears to be a bold defense of Origen's principles of biblical interpretation. Indeed, there is good reason to

[38] Ibid., 37–38.

[39] Ibid., 49.

understand it as such. In the introduction to his book, de Lubac writes with firm conviction (and perhaps in response to de Faye), "Origen was not the mad 'allegorist' he is so often thought to be!"[40] He hopes to prove this by "seeking to discover what Origen thought by finding out, without any preconceived decision, what it was he said, through as extensive a reading and as literal an exegesis as possible."[41] Yet while de Lubac does in fact defend Origen on a number of key points, many scholars have failed to note the severe criticisms leveled against Origen's interpretive methodology. The Origen de Lubac presents is no doubt a master exegete and theologian, but he also has "questionable traits,"[42] "insufficiencies" in his technique,[43] and "deficiencies in his doctrine."[44] He sometimes "consents a bit quickly"[45] in denying the historical sense, thereby "abusing the principle he himself set."[46] He does not always "distinguish [his terms] sufficiently from each other,"[47] he "borrowed too much from [Philo],"[48] he "does not always escape the arbitrary,"[49] he is "almost totally unaware both of Semitic ways of thinking and of the literary modes

[40] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 9.

[41] Ibid., 12.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 14.

[44] Ibid., 60.

[45] Ibid., 113.

[46] Ibid., 116.

[47] Ibid., 129.

[48] Ibid., 186.

[49] Ibid., 228.

of expression that correspond to them,"[50] his "ignorance of Hebrew parallelism" and respect for the Septuagint led him at times into "groundless speculations,"[51] and it would in fact be acceptable to "reproach Origen for 'picking up expressions this way and that' with no concern for the 'order and the sequence of the books.'"[52] These critiques are quite serious, but it is easy to miss them because they are most often drowned in a sea of praise for the Alexandrian exegete. Indeed, de Lubac himself dismisses them as rather trivial. One must be more specific, then, in labeling this book a "defense." In truth, de Lubac makes a careful distinction between the "spirit" of Origen's exegesis and the "technique" involved in his exegesis. In his introduction, de Lubac writes, "I am … convinced that if it is necessary to note an insufficiency here in what concerns Origen, it is much less one of spirit than one of technique."[53] De Lubac does not attempt to defend every exegetical decision Origen makes, but rather to "rediscover the soul" of an exegetical and truly theological vision.[54] What he encounters is "a whole manner of thinking … a whole interpretation of Christianity of which Origen … was less the author than the witness."[55]

[50] Ibid., 283.

[51] Ibid., 350.

[52] Ibid., 358.

[53] Ibid., 14.

[54] Ibid., 429.

[55] Ibid., 11.

The lasting impact of de Lubac's work, however, is not a result of his praise for the spirit of Origen's exegesis. Rather, it is a result of his claim that Origen was first and foremost a Christian. In opposition to de Faye, de Lubac writes:

> One thing is certain: Origen's effort was inconceivable to a Hellenic mind … Whatever the procedural similarities we might be able to enumerate, whatever the mutual participation we might even be able to observe in the same "allegorizing" mentality, that effort alone is enough to place an abyss between Origen, thoroughly marked by Christianity, and those Greeks to whom he is at times thoughtlessly compared.[56]

For de Lubac, Origen's "spiritual" exegesis was directly in line with both the exegetical traditions of the New Testament, and the Christian exegetical traditions that would follow him. The goal is always to see Christ in the Scriptures, which immediately sets him apart from any Greek philosopher. In short, Origen is thoroughly Christian, and the spirit of his methodology is therefore thoroughly Christian. Despite conceding that he does not always escape subjectivity, for de Lubac, that subjectivity is not a result of pagan philosophical influence or deceptive self-serving.

R.P.C. Hanson

Despite the impact of de Lubac's book, the debate over subjectivity did not end with its publication. Within a decade of the release of *Histoire et Esprit*, R. P. C. Hanson responded with his own book, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture*. From the very beginning, Hanson frames his work with the following question: "Has the interpretation of the Bible as it is practiced today anything seriously in common with the interpretation of

[56] Ibid., 317.

the Bible as Origen, and indeed as the early Church generally, practiced it?"[57] Predictably, Hanson does not answer favorably. Aimed sharply at many of the claims in *Histoire et Esprit*, Hanson takes an uncharitable view of Origen's scriptural interpretation. Whether speaking of "spirit" or "technique," Hanson echoes de Faye and simply cannot see Origen's methodology as anything else but subjective and self-serving. For Hanson, Origen is guilty of two charges: overlooking the significance of history in the Bible, and excessively relying on allegorical interpretation. The following best sums up his position:

> We must confess that Origen was generally speaking not seriously restrained by the Bible; he knew very little about the intellectual discipline demanded for the faithful interpretation of biblical thought; his presuppositions were very little altered by contact with the material in the Bible, though he was perfectly willing to accept the ideas of the Bible where they did not conflict with his presuppositions … Where the Bible did not obviously mean what he thought it to mean, or even where it obviously did not mean what he thought it ought to mean, he had only to turn the magic ring of allegory, and—Hey Presto!—the desired meaning appeared. Allegory, in short, instead of ensuring that he would in his exegesis maintain close contact with biblical thought, rendered him deplorably independent of the Bible.[58]

Hanson's antagonism toward Origen's biblical interpretation is hardly shrouded. His antagonism toward de Lubac is also quite evident, as when he writes of *Histoire et Esprit*: "It is ridiculous to claim that [Origen] was not in his Homilies, or elsewhere, in any significant way influenced by contemporary philosophy. We cannot dismiss de Faye's gigantic work in sentences such as these."[59] Though *Allegory and Event*

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[57] Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 7.

[58] Ibid., 371. Given Hanson's obviously biased reading of Origen, there is a sense of irony when he writes of de Lubac: "It is this sort of wild distortion [the claim that Origen's theology was not esoteric] that makes the reader of his book regret that the author's learning and acumen have been devoted to a partisan presentation of Origen's thought instead of to the authoritative account of it which might have appeared from his pen." *Allegory and Event*, 224, n.2.

[59] Ibid., 185–86.

takes a step backward in its total endorsement of de Faye, it has proven to be a fruitful catalyst for further research. Hanson's work is both thorough and provocative, and though it has often become a storehouse of tendentious quotations, readily accessible for the many scholars who wish to offer a more charitable reading of Origen, it cannot be overlooked or ignored.

Blossom Stefaniw

The debate continues into the present day, and the number of voices has only increased. A more recent addition to literature on the subject is Blossom Stefaniw's 2010 book, *Mind, Text, and Commentary: Noetic Exegesis in Origen of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius Ponticus*. Stefaniw approaches the topic via the anthropological methodology of Clifford Geertz and the literary critical work of Stanley Fish, all the while comparing and contrasting the figures of Origen, Didymus, and Evagrius with one another. By utilizing Geertz, she believes she is able to provide "an account of exegesis which includes the commentators' own concerns and preoccupations, as well as attention to the reasoning behind the interpretive work which they themselves provide."[60] By utilizing Fish, she hopes to demonstrate that the "assumptions of the community reading a text are what determines the meaning which is found in that text."[61] In a somewhat novel move, she dispenses with phrases like "figural" or "spiritual" exegesis, preferring to speak of *noetic* exegesis: "Calling this particular type of exegesis noetic is an attempt to reflect the relevant exegetes' beliefs that the higher interpretation of the text required the application of the *nous* to

[60] Blossom Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, Commentary: Noetic Exegesis in Origen of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius Ponticus* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), 365.

[61] Ibid.

the text in order to perceive the intelligible truths contained within it."[62]

Her approach is therefore distinctive, but she arrives at a number of conclusions that do not differ significantly from earlier works on the subject. For example, she is more interested in the spirit of Origen's scriptural interpretation than in his "technique." She emphatically stresses, "Noetic exegesis is not a name for any particular hermeneutical technique."[63] Rather, it is a reflection of a specific community's interpretive assumptions. One cannot help but think of de Lubac, who states that Origen's exegesis was not, strictly speaking, "the scientific study of a text,"[64] but "a whole manner of thinking … a whole interpretation of Christianity of which Origen … was less the author than the witness."[65] Like de Faye and Hanson, however, Stefaniw would argue that this "whole manner of thinking" was far from a distinctly *Christian* manner of thinking. In her introduction, she posits, "Neither the practice of noetic exegesis nor the individual interpretive assumptions driving it were exclusively or particularly Christian."[66] Indeed, "the characteristics of noetic exegesis are explicable on cultural, functional, and social, rather than confessional, doctrinal, and individual grounds."[67] Still, despite the similarities, she differs from Hanson in that Hanson would view these influences as negative factors that Origen

[62] Ibid., 29. In another explanation, she writes, "Noetic exegesis can preliminarily be defined as exegesis which is concerned with perceiving the noetic content of an authoritative text by means of noetic comprehension of the higher significance of the text and with a view to rehabilitating and cultivating the interpreter's *nous* (the *nous* is a mental organ believed to be capable of perfect intuitive comprehension of intelligible reality whose function is compromised by the embodied state)." Ibid., 13.

[63] Ibid., 373.

[64] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 471.

[65] Ibid., 11.

[66] Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, Commentary*, 19.

[67] Ibid., 12.

ought to have avoided, whereas as Stefaniw sees them as entirely unavoidable and oftentimes subconscious. For Stefaniw, Origen is necessarily subjective. This is neither positive nor negative. Origen merely reflects the assumptions of the community he found himself in.

Stefaniw's work does not therefore offer many new conclusions regarding Origen, but rather new ways of looking at conclusions first articulated by earlier authors. However, her decision to utilize the single term "noetic exegesis" in place of the usual cornucopia of terms such as "allegorical," "figural," and "spiritual" is both warranted and beneficial. There must always be room to use these various designations when an ancient author uses them, or when describing specific interpretive maneuvers, but referring to "noetic exegesis" and the application of the *nous* allows for a greater sense of specificity overall, and is a more accurate description of what Origen demands of himself and his audience (as we shall see).

Elizabeth Dively Lauro

Lastly, in her 2005 book, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis*, Elizabeth Dively Lauro claims that when discussing the arbitrary nature of Origen's exegesis, scholars have two distinctive concerns: "First, they question whether his method is *subjective*, that is, not adequately focused on the text itself. Second, they question whether it is *inconsistent*, that is, variable within and between his theory and practice."[68] As we have already seen, earlier debate centered more upon the question of subjectivity than of inconsistency. In fact, until recently there has been very little *debate* regarding the question of inconsistency at all. Scholars

[68] Dively Lauro, *Soul and Spirit of Scripture*, 13.

almost unanimously agreed that Origen's theoretical principles of interpretation differed significantly from his practice of interpreting.[69] Dively Lauro writes, "While they acknowledge that his allegorical readings of Scripture are useful for directing the Christian's spiritual life, they often view his theory as unclear or, at least, inconsistent with his practice."[70]

The problem lies in the fact that Origen does not often seem to follow the tripartite interpretive methodology he famously sets out in *On First Principles*. In Book Four, he states:

> Each one must therefore portray the meaning of the divine writings in a threefold way upon his own soul; that is, so that the simple may be edified by what we may call the body of the Scriptures (for such is the name we may give to the common and literal interpretation); while those who have begun to make a little progress and are able to perceive something more than that may be edified by the soul of Scripture; and those who are perfect … may be edified by that spiritual law, which has "a shadow of the good things to come," as if by the Spirit. Just as man, therefore, is said to consist of body, soul, and spirit, so also does the Holy Scripture, which has been bestowed by the divine bounty for man's salvation.[71]

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[69] For example, de Faye writes, "The allegorical meaning is the only one he takes into account … His scorn of the literal sense of the text knows no bounds." *Origen and His Work*, 49; Hanson writes, "Though in some of his homilies Origen does conscientiously complete his threefold interpretation by including the 'moral' sense of the passage under review, and though he does occasionally draw out this sense in his commentaries, on the whole this 'moral' sense plays no significant part in Origen's exegesis … because in the practical work of expounding Scripture he found it impossible to maintain the distinction between the 'moral' and the 'spiritual' sense, and the former became absorbed in the latter." *Allegory and Event*, 243; Crouzel writes, "In fact Origen hardly ever expounds all three meanings but goes on from the literal to either the moral or the mystical. His vocabulary, which expresses before all else the examplarist vision of the world, does not permit a simple distinction between the second and third meanings." *Origen*, 79; Torjesen adds, "The traditional identification of the body, soul, and spirit of Scripture in Origen with three separate and self-contained senses of the same text—the literal, the moral, and the mystical senses—cannot be supported from specific textual arguments … Nowhere does Origen employ it with any kind of consistency. In most of his discussions of interpretation he refers only to the letter and the spirit … The identification of a moral sense is especially problematic." Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 41; Finally, John O'Keefe writes, "Many scholars have been confused by the methodological discussions Origen advances in *First Principles* because Origen himself does not apply a tripartite system throughout his corpus." "Scriptural Interpretation," *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 194.

[70] Dively Lauro, *Soul and Spirit of Scripture*, 14.

[71] *PArch* 4.2.

Though Origen claims a threefold method in theory (somatic, psychic, and pneumatic), it is often said that in practice his method is twofold (literal and non-literal, or spiritual). The criticisms usually fall heaviest upon the psychic sense. Is it a distinct sense at all? Is it directed specifically toward morality, or toward something else? Does Origen merge it with the pneumatic sense, creating one overarching "spiritual sense"? These questions are further complicated by issues of Origen's varied terminology. Is the first level of interpretation "literal" or "somatic"? Is the second level "moral" or "psychic?" Is the third level "allegorical" or "pneumatic"? What does one do with terms such as "anagogical," "tropological," and "typological"? Are these distinctive methods or levels of interpretation, or should they all be categorized as "spiritual?" Dively Lauro discusses the problem of terminology directly, but more importantly, her book is the first to posit that Origen does consistently hold to a threefold method of biblical interpretation.

Though Origen does not utilize three interpretive senses in every instance, Dively Lauro does not believe this makes Origen "inconsistent." She suggests that a variety of circumstances may have caused Origen to focus on one, two, or three of the senses in any given interpretation, but that focusing on only one or two of the senses does not negate the fact that he believes there to be three. For example, he may be preaching to those who would benefit from only one of the senses. Some would be too immature for the pneumatic sense. Others may be so mature that to reflect on the literal, somatic sense would be detrimental to their spiritual progress. Perhaps he is merely restricted by time, and feels that certain levels of interpretation

demand more attention than others.[72] Or, perhaps there are instances in which Origen himself does not know the pneumatic meaning of a text, as he himself indicates in his *Homilies on Numbers* (27.4).[73] Ultimately, Dively Lauro argues that Origen "held to the same exegetical theory of three senses of meaning throughout his life, maintaining consistent definitions of the senses in the variety of his homilies and commentaries."[74] She thoroughly defends the psychic sense in particular, arguing that it has a precise definition and is entirely distinguishable from the somatic and pneumatic senses. It is the call to the long and difficult struggle for virtue. It is the path to Christ, through Christ. She writes, "The pneumatic sense focuses on Christ as the goal and the psychic sense on Christ as the way."[75] Yet the psychic sense is not merely a *general* call to virtue. It is not a path one can travel without Christ. It is entirely Christocentric. It is "more accurately described as the call to 'temporal' imitation of Christ, facilitated by an ever-enriching exposure to him in the pneumatic sense."[76] The psychic and pneumatic senses therefore work together to bring about spiritual transformation in the audience. This cooperative relationship between the two senses demonstrates, in Dively Lauro's opinion, "the pinnacle of Origen's exegetical practice."[77] Her work is thorough, and her conclusions both provocative

[72] She writes, "Origen does not promise in his theory to extract both senses from every passage that he exegetes. He claims only that both *can* be extracted from Scripture's passages. We should expect him to consider the audience and situation of each exegetical exercise and determine whether discussion of one or both of these nonliteral meanings is timely, relevant, and merited." *Soul and Spirit of Scripture*, 59.

[73] Ibid., 7.

[74] Ibid., 10.

[75] Ibid., 147.

[76] Ibid., 196.

[77] Ibid., 200.

and compelling. No longer can it simply be assumed that Origen's work is internally inconsistent.[78]

The Perfection of the Hearer/Reader

Karen Jo Torjesen

A more recent theme, and one which now pervades every book on the subject of Origen's scriptural interpretation, is the notion that Origen's exegesis is meant to move the soul of the hearer toward perfection, and thus salvation. In 1986, Karen Torjesen published *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*, in which she places a strong emphasis on the role of the hearer in the interpretive process: "Thus far scholars have asked for the relationship between the text and its interpretation or, by what principles is the interpretation to be derived from this text. Now the question must consider three mutually engaged reference points: the text, the means of its interpretation, and the hearer for whom this exegesis is conducted."[79] In fact, she goes so far as to write, "The essential task of exegesis in Origen has been decisively organized around the figure of the hearer/reader."[80] In reference to Origen's threefold method of interpretation, Torjesen suggests that

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[78] However, her conclusions as of yet have not been fully appropriated by Origen scholars. Blossom Stefaniw has since written, "Unfortunately, [Origen, Didymus, and Evagrius] did not set down a clear, explicit, and demonstrably consistently applied procedure for how a noetic interpretation of any given text could be attained, nor are they themselves particularly structured or consistent in the steps they go through in order to reach their interpretations." *Mind, Text, Commentary,* 221. Additionally, Peter Martens writes, "While Origen draws upon a rich vocabulary to describe his exegetical practice, most of these terms fall into two categories: those that describe nonliteral (ascending, figurative, tropological, allegorical, spiritual, symbolic, etc) exegesis on the one hand, and those that describe literal exegesis (exegesis according to the letter, according to history) on the other." Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 64.

[79] Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 13.

[80] Ibid., 12.

Origen does not mean to describe three *senses* of meaning, but rather three *pedagogical levels* drawn out for the benefit of the audience. They are three levels of progress in the hearer's journey toward perfection: "What Origen wishes to communicate here is that contained in Scripture is an order of doctrines which corresponds to the progressive steps of the Christian's movement toward perfection. It is the task of the exegete to draw out of Scripture those doctrines which meet the needs of his hearers."[81] Again, the hearer is central.

In terms of methodology, she identifies four steps by which Origen brings the reader into the text and thereby into their journey toward perfection: "In a first step Origen asks, what is the grammatical sense of this text? In a second step he asks, what is the concrete and/or historical reality to which the grammatical sense refers? In a third step he asks, what is the Logos teaching through this concrete reality? In a fourth and last step Origen asks, how can this teaching be applied to the hearer of the text today?"[82] Torjesen adds, "Origen's exegesis of any passage in Scripture (regardless of genre) followed a pattern of four steps."[83]

The notion that biblical interpretation is meant to lead the hearer to perfection and salvation has become a central premise in nearly every book on Origen's exegesis since. In Dively Lauro's recent work, this point is simply a given, and so she sets out to understand "*how* Origen specifically draws out Scripture's transformative meanings for his listeners."[84] She argues that the cooperative

[81] Ibid., 41.

[82] Ibid., 138.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Dively Lauro, *Soul and Spirit of Scripture*, 35; emphasis mine.

relationship between the psychic and pneumatic senses "is the key to [Origen's] exegetical effort to effect Scripture's spiritual purpose of transforming its hearer in preparation for salvation."[85] Blossom Stefaniw's book, described above, has in many ways taken the role of the hearer even further by employing the literary critical theory of Stanley Fish: "The assumptions of the community reading a text are what determines the meaning which is found in that text."[86] Though distinctively different, her work demonstrates the central role that the hearer has come to play in recent studies.

Peter Martens

Lastly, there is Peter Martens' 2012 book, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*. Martens approaches the topic of Origen's scriptural interpretation via an examination of the *interpreter*, rather than the audience who merely hears the interpretation. He notes that earlier studies do not grasp "the central and organizing force" of Origen's exegetical project: the interpreter.[87] "This figure was the heart of the exegetical enterprise, the one who mastered philological skills, applied them in very particular ways to the explication of Scripture and, in turn, addressed its message(s) to diverse audiences."[88] By examining the interpreter he distinguishes his own work from Torjesen's, who focused primarily on the recipients of an already formulated interpretation. However, he notes that his own work and Torjesen's complement one another, and that they in fact "approach the same

[85] Ibid., 36.

[86] Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, Commentary*, 365.

[87] Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 5.

[88] Ibid.

phenomenon from opposite ends of the spectrum."[89] Martens divides his book into two parts: first, an examination of the scholarly abilities required of the ideal interpreter (skill in text criticism, historical analysis, and literary analysis),[90] and second, an examination of the way in which the interpreter participates in "the living drama of salvation."[91] All the while, he utilizes specific examples from Origen's life and work. He writes:

> My central thesis in this book is that Origen contextualized interpreters—himself included—within the Christian doctrine of salvation. In examining this drama as it unfolded on Scripture's pages, ideal interpreters participated in it: biblical interpretation afforded these philologists an occasion through which to express various facets of their existing Christian commitment, as well as to receive divine resources for their continued journey in faith … culminating in the everlasting contemplation of God.[92]

In reading this thesis, it is easy to see again how influential Torjesen has been on modern Origen scholarship. Scriptural interpretation is meant to aid the both the hearer *and* the interpreter in their "continued journey in faith," which culminates in perfection, salvation, and "the everlasting contemplation of God."

Because it focuses on the interpreter specifically, Martens' sees his work and forging a new path, or a *fifth* approach in studies on Origen and Scripture. However, there is a sense in which it ought to be grouped together with the work of Torjesen (and in some ways, Stefaniw). Both Torjesen and Martens look *outside* the text, one to the hearer, one to the interpreter. But while the interpreter takes a much more active role than the hearer (a role well worth studying), the intended outcomes are

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[89] Ibid., 10.

[90] Ibid., 42.

[91] Ibid., 67.

[92] Ibid., xi.

remarkably similar. Perhaps, then, we ought to redefine, or widen the boundaries of the fourth approach, such that it would include any study that emphasizes the effect of the text on the reader or hearer, rather than the text itself.

Scripture as Incarnate Word

Let us return now to the topic of the present study. Though Torjesen is occasionally credited for popularizing this theme as well,[93] it was Henri de Lubac who first pointed out in a sustained manner that for Origen, it is not enough to say that Christ is the key to all scriptural interpretation, or that he is the theme of every book. It is not enough even to say that the spiritual sense *is* the Christocentric sense. For Origen, Christ is also the very content of the Scriptures. De Lubac writes, "Scripture is Logos, and it proclaims the Logos."[94] They are one and the same, and Origen will insist upon this point time and time again.[95]

His reasoning is as simple as it is profound: there cannot be two "Words" (*logoi*) of God. In his various homilies on the prophets, Origen finds himself repeatedly encountering phrases such as, "the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel" (Ez 1:3), or "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord" (Jer 7:1). But rather than understanding "word of the Lord" to be equivalent to a *message* from the Lord, Origen identifies it with the singular and personal Word of God:

For who is "the word which came from the Lord" to Jeremiah or to Isaiah or to

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[93] See for example, Dively Lauro, *Soul and Spirit of Scripture*, 26–31.

[94] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 385.

[95] Recent studies have also sought to stress the fact that Christ is the one who *teaches* the Scriptures. He is therefore revealing himself to the reader, or, as Torjesen puts it, "It is himself that he discloses." *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 119–20. He does for the reader now what he did for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, as described in the Gospel of Luke: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24:27).

> Ezekiel or anyone except the one "in the beginning with God?" I do not know any "word" of the Lord other than the one concerning whom the Evangelist said, "The Word was in the beginning, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."[96]

The one who was "in the beginning with God" is the one who came to all the writers of the Old Testament. He is also the one through whom "all things were made" (Jn 1:3). He is the "word" that was proclaimed by Paul to the Beroeans (Acts 17:13). He is the rider on the white horse in the book of Revelation, whose name is "the Word of God" (Rv 19:13). Perhaps most importantly, he is the one who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).[97] In short, he is Christ.[98]

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[96] *HomJr* 9.1. Τίς γάρ ἐστιν « ὁ λόγος ὁ γενόμενος παρὰ κυρίου » εἴτε πρὸς Ἰερεμίαν εἴτε πρὸς Ἡσαίαν εἴτε πρὸς Ἰεζεκιὴλ εἴτε πρὸς ὁνδήποτε ἢ ὁ « ἐν ἀρχῇ » « πρὸς τὸν θεόν » ; Ἐγὼ οὐκ οἶδα ἄλλον λόγον κυρίου ἢ τοῦτον, περὶ οὗ εἴρηκεν ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς τὸ « ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος ». See also *ComJn* 20.398, and *HomEz* 1.9: "'And the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, son of Buzi, the priest.' This is the 'word of the Lord,' who 'in the beginning was God, the Word with the Father.'" De Lubac comments: "Now, there are not two Words any more than there are two Spirits. Just as the spirit of the Scriptures is none other than the Holy Spirit, so the Word of God that is Scripture, or that Scripture contains, is none other, in his essence, than the Logos, the One 'who was in the beginning with God,' the one who is 'living Wisdom and Son of God.' On both sides, it is still the same word, the same biblical word, and there is no play of words in that." De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 385.

[97] This single identity of the one Word of God manifests itself in a multitude of ways throughout Origen's work, not only in relation to Scripture. Robert Daly argues that there are at least four interconnected levels of meaning: "First, this Word is the pre–existent, eternal, divine Logos, the Logos proclaimed in the prologue of John's gospel … Second, this same divine Logos is the one who took flesh of the Virgin Mary, lived and worked among us, suffered, died, rose again and ascended to the Father … Third, this same eternal Word who took flesh of Mary has also become incarnate in the words of scripture. Fourth, this same divine Word, born of Mary and also incarnate in the scriptures, also dwells and is at work within us, espoused to our souls, calling us to make progress toward perfection, and to work with him in ascending to and subjecting all things to the Father." Hans Urs von Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), xiv. This last point is particularly important to Origen. He declares, "But we need also to see that the dwelling of the Word is with each of those who can especially benefit. For what profit is it for me if the Word has dwelt in the world and I do not have him?" (*HomJr* 9.2). I would also argue that Origen perceives the Eucharist to be a manifestation of this same Word. In *SerMt* 85, Origen asks, "For what else could the body and the blood of God the Word be except the Word which nourishes and the Word which 'makes glad the heart?'" Trans. Daniel Sheerin, *The Eucharist*, Message of the Fathers of the Church 7 (Wilmington, Delaware, 1986), 188.

[98] As we shall see on numerous occasions, Origen will often use "Word" and "Christ," or "Jesus," interchangeably, because they are equated with one another in the scriptures (particularly in the Johannine Prologue). I will therefore do the same, except in those places where Origen himself creates a distinction.

As a result, Scripture itself is Christ.[99] This point has been well recognized by Origen scholars. But what makes Origen's treatment of this theme so unique is that he goes one step further, equating the words and phrases of the text with the *flesh* of Christ specifically. Origen famously articulates this in the first of his *Homilies on Leviticus*:

> As "in the last days," the Word of God, having been clothed with the flesh of Mary, proceeded into this world. Indeed, one thing was what was seen in him, another what was understood. For the sight of his flesh was open to all, but the knowledge of his divinity was given to few, even to the elect. So also when the Word of God was brought to humans through the prophets and the lawgiver, it was not brought without proper garments. For just as there it was covered with the veil of the flesh, so here with the veil of the letter, so that the letter may be seen as flesh, but the spiritual sense hiding within may be perceived as divine.[100]

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[99] We might ask which books comprise "Scripture" for Origen. The best discussion of this is found in Ronald Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 65–82. Summarizing that work, Heine notes that Origen cites all thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as eleven additional texts: the Epistle of Jeremiah, Baruch, Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the three additions to Daniel found in the Septuagint. Excepting Baruch, Judith, and 1 Maccabees, Origen explicitly refers to each of these as "Scripture." As for the New Testament, Origen mentions the four traditional Gospels, Acts, and "the epistles of the apostles" in the context of discussing "the Scriptures which are in circulation in all the churches of God and which are believed to be divine" (*ComJn* 1.14–26). In the same work, he states, "if the writings of Paul were gospel, it is consistent with that to say that Peter's writings also were gospel" (*ComJn* 1.26), though in a fragment of the fifth book of the *Commentary on John*, he indicates that Peter's second epistle is disputed, as are the second and third epistles of the apostle John (Eusebius, *EH* 6.25). In the same fragment, he attributes Revelation to the apostle John, and in another, links Hebrews with "someone who remembered [Paul's] teaching and wrote his own interpretation of what his master had said" (ibid.). Origen may also have considered some of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers to be among the Scriptures, as he refers to the *Shepherd of Hermas* as a "Scripture in circulation among the churches but not considered to be divine by all" (*ComMt* 14.21), and notes that it is "divinely inspired" (*ComRm* 10.31). I will discuss the way Origen defines the term "gospel," with relation to many of these writings, in Chapter Four. Ultimately, however, Origen does not seem concerned to point out *which* scriptural books comprise the "flesh" of the incarnate Word. The question of a "canon," understood as an authoritative list of texts, does not seem to hold a place of prominence in his work, particularly in relation to the subject of a scriptural incarnation.

[100] *HomLev* 1.1, translation mine. Sicut *in novissimis diebus* Verbum Dei ex Maria carne vestitum processit in hunc mundum et aliud quidem erat, quod videbatur in eo, aliud, quod intelligebatur—carnis namque adspectus in eo patebat omnibus, paucis vero et electis dabatur divinitatis agnitio—, ita et cum per prophetas vel legislatorem Verbum Dei profertur ad homines, non absque competentibus profertur indumentis. Nam sicut ibi carnis, ita hic litterae velamine tegitur, ut littera quidem adspiciatur tamquam caro, latens vero intrinsecus spiritalis sensus tamquam divinitas

To put it plainly, Scripture is not just the Word of God, but the *incarnate* Word of God.[101] Origen does not hesitate to say so, which is precisely why he openly declares, "For always in the Scriptures the Word became flesh that he might tabernacle among us."[102]

De Lubac, in the first real treatment of this theme, writes, "In this way, Scripture seems like a first incorporation of the Logos. He who is by nature invisible can be seen and touched in it, as if in the flesh that he was to assume; and reciprocally, this flesh is a letter that makes him readable to us."[103] The gravity of this insight is clear, but since the time of *Histoire et Esprit*, it has most often been viewed as an interesting analogy, secondary to that bodily Incarnation which is more fundamental. Thus, Hanson writes, "The Incarnation of Jesus Christ the Word of God has a *parallel* in the indwelling (perhaps we might call it 'inscriptation') of the Word of God in the Scriptures."[104] Torjesen states, "The mediating activity of the Logos in Scripture is *analogous* to his mediating activity in the incarnation."[105] Finally, Martens writes, "The Word's inspiration of Scripture also drives an important

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sentiatur.

[101] Thus, Mark Sheridan writes, "Scripture is nothing other than the perennial incarnation of the Logos." "Scripture", *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 200. Similarly, Manlio Simonetti states, "[Origen] does not limit himself to thinking of Scripture as a book inspired by the Holy Spirit, but as the divine word he effectively identifies it with Christ (= the Logos), the Word of God: the letter of the sacred text functions, like the human body assumed by Christ, as the envelope which encloses the divine Logos … Sacred Scripture is the permanent incarnation of the Logos." *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. John A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 41.

[102] *Philoc* 15.19.

[103] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 386.

[104] Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 193; emphasis mine.

[105] Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 113; emphasis mine.

analogy we often see in Origen's writings between Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh, and Scripture, the Word-made-page: both Jesus and Scripture are infused and animated by the same divine Word."[106] No doubt, these scholars are right. Origen does perceive the two "incarnations" as analogous, as evidenced by the passage above. But the analogous relationship is not itself the point he wishes to emphasize. Origen's understanding of Scripture as the incarnate Word of God is more than worthy of consideration in its own right.

Since the mid twentieth century, there have been a handful of efforts to provide some level of sustained reflection on this theme. Aside from de Lubac, they include the work of Rolf Gögler and John Behr, as well as a few others who have seen in this a sacramental view of Scripture. I will therefore briefly examine the contributions and approaches of these studies before turning to my own approach.

Rolf Gögler

Gögler's *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes* provides what is perhaps the most extensive treatment of this subject to date. Taking Origen's words at face value, he states unequivocally, "Die Hl. Schrift ist eine blebende Inkarnation des Logos."[107] However, before arriving at this point, he guides his readers through a thorough and systematic examination of Greek and Jewish allegory, Hellenistic philosophy, Gnosticism, and all the intricacies of Logos theology. This extensive network of influences, when linked with Origen's own theology and exegetical methodology, allows Gögler to draw a number of distinctive parallels between

[106] Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 217.

[107] Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes*, 302.

Origen's theology of Scripture and his theology of the Incarnation. The relationship between the letter and the spirit of the text mirrors the relationship between the flesh of Christ and his divinity (a parallel we have already witnessed in *HomLev* 1.1). Specifically, Scripture is a form of *kenosis* on the part of the Word, as is his bodily Incarnation: "Der ärmliche Wortlaut bildet die irdenen Gefäse, in denen wir den Logos besitzen."[108] The Logos accommodates himself verbally to each individual according to his/her capacity, and each individual must simultaneously search for his presence in order to progress along the spiritual path. However, what is most unique about Gögler's approach is his explanation of *how* the words of the text function as "flesh." He draws on Origen's Stoic view of language and etymology, which posits a direct relationship between the name of a thing and its essence: "Name ist nicht nur Hinweis wie das Zeichen, sondern Darbietung des geistigen Wesens der Sache selbst."[109] The words of Scripture, while only crude shadows of the divine reality, nevertheless participate in or contain something of that reality. Furthermore, just as Christ, the Word, is the "image of the invisible God,"[110] Gögler argues that for

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., 214. Origen speaks often about the inherent power of words and names. He rejects the Aristotelian notion that names are given by arbitrary determination (Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 2, 16a 27), opting instead for the Stoic belief that they are given by nature and participate in that which they name (see the criticisms of Cicero in *De Natura Deorum* 3.24.62). As a result, Origen affirms the power of magical formulas and incantations, whether for good or for evil. Speaking the name of a demon will summon that demon, while speaking the name of an angel will summon that angel. The name of Jesus is the most powerful of all, and is able to ward off any demonic being. As for the words of Scripture, he notes that their very reading benefits the soul, with or without understanding: "Do we not believe that every pronouncement either of discourses or of names of Holy Scripture must be regarded as much stronger and more potent than every enchantment and incantation?" (*HomJos* 20.1). See also *CCels* 1.6, 24–25; 4.33; 5.45; 8.37; *ExhMart* 46; *PEuch* 24.2.

[110] See Col 1:15.

Origen, the words of Scripture function as "images" of the *true* Word.[111] To read or hear them is in some way to touch the reality behind them, which is Christ.

John Behr

In John Behr's survey of second and third-century Christianity, *The Way to Nicaea*, he too argues that for Origen, "the Word of God is 'incarnate' in the writings of the Law and the Prophets,"[112] and he too recognizes that "the difference between seeing Jesus as an ordinary man and contemplating him transfigured in divine glory is that of merely reading the words of scripture, expressed in the common idiom, and understanding their divine content."[113] However, unlike Gögler, he does not draw on Origen's Stoic theory of language/etymology as a solution. It is not the shared nature of word and reality that permits Origen to speak of Scripture as flesh, but rather, in Origen's own words, that "the garments of the Word are the phrases of scripture; these words are the clothing of the divine thoughts."[114] That is, the words and phrases of Scripture *give him shape*, and make him both perceptible and comprehensible to the reader/hearer. Behr ties in to this Origen's extensive treatment of the "aspects" (ἐπίνοιαι) of Christ, which are his numerous scriptural titles, such as Wisdom, Word,

[111] He writes, "Der Sinn des Wortes liegt ja in seinem logos. Aber der Wortlaut hat die Fähigkeit, diesen logos zu bezeichnen, Sprache ist darstellendes Zeichen für die Wirklichkeit, Hinweis auf den Logos. Die Worte geben Zeugnis vom Urwort (Logos). Wie der Logos Typ und Bild des unsichtbaren Vaters ist, so ist der Wortlaut und der Buchstabe (die Schrift) Typ, Bild, Schatten des Mysteriums Logos. 'Was der Buchstabe sagt, ist Schatten.' Schatten ist die beste Entsprechung und der Wirklichkeit treu folgendes Nachbild. Wie der Schatten zur Wirklichkeit, so paßt der Wortlaut zum Logos, dem er zugehört. Buchstabe und Geist sind vergleichbar, Wortlaut und Gedanke haben Ähnlichkeit. Origenes würde nicht so häufig dazu auffordern, Wortlaut und Text genau zu beachten und zu untersuchen, wenn er diese nicht für den getreuesten Spiegel der Wahrheit hielte." *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes*, 351–52.

[112] Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, 174.

[113] Ibid., 180.

[114] *Philoc* 15.19.

Way, Shepherd, Gate, and so on. These titles make him known to the reader, and the movement upward from more material titles such as Rock or Physician to the more spiritual ones like Truth and Wisdom is an essential part of recognizing the divinity of the Scriptures, and thus the divinity of Christ.[115] This explanation is somewhat more abstract than Gögler's, but the *epinoiai* are one of the most important and constant themes in Origen's work, and as we shall see, he directly compares them to the bodily flesh of Jesus in his colossal apologetic work, *Contra Celsus*.

The "Sacramental" Approach

In contrast to the above, the most common approach has been to see in Origen's teaching on Scripture a parallel with the Eucharistic doctrine of the Real Presence. That is, Origen's doctrine of Scripture is sacramental at heart, and the text acts as "flesh" because it contains within it the Real Presence of the Logos. As a result, the *consumption* of the body of Christ through the Scriptures takes center stage. Proponents of this view include Elizabeth Dively Lauro, Richard Smith, Daniel Shin, and Hans Boersma.[116] Thus Boersma writes, "We can only appreciate how Origen's exegesis functions if and when we come to understand the sacramental structure that lies at the basis of his interpretation,"[117] and Dively Lauro states, "Origen uses consumption of Christ in Eucharist as a basis for discussing

[115] Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 178–84.

[116] See Daniel Shin, "Some Light from Origen: Scripture as Sacrament," *Worship* 73 (1999): 399–425; Hans Boersma, "Joshua as Sacrament: Spiritual Interpretation in Origen," *Crux* 48, no. 3 (2012): 23–40; Elizabeth Dively Lauro, "The Eschatological Significance of Scripture According to Origen," *Studia Patristica* 56 (2013): 83–102; Richard Gerard Smith, "The Sacramental Word: Origen's Eucharistic Exegesis" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2013).

[117] Boersma, "Joshua as Sacrament," 24.

consumption of Christ in Scripture."[118] These claims are based primarily on Origen's own tendency to draw certain connections between Eucharist and Scripture, though the degree to which the former actually influences the latter in his theology is questionable. We will thoroughly explore the sacramental approach in the fifth and final chapter of this study.

Contribution and Outline

What, then, is left to be done? As demonstrated earlier, many scholars have treated the scriptural incarnation of Christ in Origen's work as an offshoot of what is considered the more fundamental bodily Incarnation. It is a "parallel," or an "analogy," interesting but secondary. As we have just seen, others look instead to the Eucharist as a starting point, but this serves only to replace one physical manifestation of the Logos with another, preserving the second-tier status of the Scriptures. The first aim of this study, then, is to provide a comprehensive and *focused* treatment of the scriptural incarnation of the Word in Origen's theology. The second is to do so in a new way, utilizing a fresh approach. While Gögler's work is invaluable, it is my view that Origen's Stoic theory of names is not a satisfying framework for this discussion. Behr, on the other hand, convincingly utilizes the *epinoiai* as a solution, but his treatment is limited to a small discussion in the midst of a broad survey on the whole of ante-Nicene Christian theology. The significance of the *epinoiai* therefore needs to be drawn out in much greater detail.

My own project will consist of two parts. Part One (Chapters Two and Three) addresses the nature of scriptural "flesh." Chapter Two seeks to articulate what it

[118] Dively Lauro, "Eschatological Significance," 84.

means for the Word to become "flesh" in the first place, as well as what is required to "lift the veil" and perceive that flesh as divine. By examining the role of the cross in Origen's Christology, I will demonstrate that it is only in light of the Passion, through the lens of the *crucified* Christ, that the divinity of both man (Jesus) and text (Scripture) is made manifest. Chapter Three looks to define this scriptural "flesh" in Origen's thought. I will do so by relying on the doctrine of the *epinoiai* (the "aspects" or titles of Christ). It is the *epinoiai* that clothe Christ and give him shape through the text. The movement from seeing ordinary flesh to perceiving the transfigured Christ involves not only the progression from the letter to the spirit, but also the steady climb upward through this hierarchy of scriptural names.

Part Two (Chapters Four and Five) addresses the theological and spiritual implications for the reader and interpreter of Scripture. Chapter Four addresses the "coming of Christ" (παρουσία) as an individualized noetic phenomenon, brought about by the Christological reading of Scripture in any time or place. Scriptural interpretation becomes a direct encounter with the person of Christ, and Origen will describe that encounter in a multitude of ways, from sexual intimacy to the ascent of Mount Tabor. Finally, Chapter Five addresses the consumption of Christ through the Scriptures, which turns out to be much more about hermeneutics than about sacraments. By examining the themes of priesthood, passover, and sacrifice in Origen's work, I will argue that he perceives the *recognition* of Christ in the Scriptures to be the most fundamental means of consuming his flesh and blood. A short conclusion will follow, raising some of the broader implications for Origen studies as well as for the study of early Christian biblical exegesis.

Two important caveats: first, this is not meant to be a study of the whole of Origen's doctrine of Scripture. That is, its intention is not to define the multiple senses of meaning in the text, to analyze the role of the Holy Spirit, or to underscore the ecclesial and liturgical context of scriptural reading and preaching. I will draw on each these issues where they become relevant, but will remain focused on the scriptural incarnation of the Word. Second, this is not an examination of the Logos itself in Origen's theology, or the various ways in which the Logos becomes incarnate. Rather, it is about *Scripture* as the enfleshed Word of God. Though I will often draw on these other "enfleshments" in Origen's work, particularly the bodily Incarnation, I will do so only to shed greater light on the central argument of each chapter.

Sources

Of Origen's numerous written works, four lie at the heart of this study: *On First Principles*, the *Commentary on John*, *Contra Celsus*, and *On Pascha*. Aside from *On First Principles*, the extant portions of these works have all survived in Greek.[119] However the decision to rely on these particular texts is not the result of mistrust for the Latin translations of Rufinus and Jerome.[120] Rather, they were chosen

[119] Portions of *On First Principles* also survive through the *Philocalia of Origen*, likely compiled by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus. As a result of the systematic destruction of Origen's work following the condemnation of Justinian, the works that survive in the original Greek are few. Most of them survive only in part. Among them are the *Commentary on John* (portions of ten books), *Commentary on Matthew* (eight books), *Contra Celsus*, *Dialogue with Heraclides* (with portions missing), *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, *Homily on 1 Kings* (or 1 Samuel, one homily), *Homilies on Jeremiah* (twenty homilies), *On Prayer*, and *On Pascha* (with portions missing).

[120] This has been the case for other scholars. See, for example, the introduction to George Butterworth's translation of *On First Principles*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), xlvii; R. P. C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1954), 47; Hal Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1932), 322.

for their relevant content. Indeed, throughout this project I will utilize quotations and ideas from many of Origen's other extant works, despite questions of Jerome's and Rufinus' faithfulness to the original. By now, in the words of Karen Torjesen, "most scholars agree that their translations faithfully reproduce Origen's thought."[121] Furthermore, in a now much-used quotation, de Lubac argues:

> In this case more than in others, the right procedure is not to omit but to make use of on a massive scale. To have any chance of getting at the authentic Origen, there must be a multiplicity of quotations. Then parallel passages are a check on each other, they show each other's meaning and comment on it, especially when we look, for example, at a sentence in the Latin of Rufinus, another in the Latin of Jerome and a third preserved in the original. Now it is not rare to be able to do that, and from these comparisons an impression of unity emerges.[122]

In what follows I will therefore draw freely from all of Origen's extant work, though I will note any peculiar translational difficulties or ambiguities. With that, we turn now to the topic of "flesh" and "lifting the veil" in the bodily and scriptural incarnations.

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[121] *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 18. For an extensive bibliography of studies on Rufinus as translator, see F. Winkelmann, "Einige Bemerkungen zu den Aussagen des Rufinus von Aquileia und des Hieronymus über ihre Übersetzungstheorie und method," in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, Vol. 2, ed. P. Granfield and J. Jungmann (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1970), 532–47. For a comparison between the Latin and Greek versions of the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, see E. Klostermann's discussion in *Die Überlieferung der Jeremiahomilien des Origenes*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 16.3 (Liepzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897). For more concise English overviews, see the introduction to Ronald Heine's translation of the *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, FC 71 (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 27–39; and Karen Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 14-18.

[122] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 42.

PART ONE

THE NATURE OF THE SCRIPTURAL INCARNATION

CHAPTER TWO

LIFTING THE VEIL: THE CROSS, THE INCARNATION AND THE IDENTITY OF CHRIST

> For whereas the Word of God was without flesh, he took upon himself the holy flesh by the holy Virgin, and prepared a robe which he wove for himself, like a bridegroom, in the sufferings of the cross, in order that by uniting his own power with our mortal body, and by mixing the incorruptible with the corruptible, and the strong with the weak, he might save perishing man.
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> The web-beam, therefore, is the passion of the Lord upon the cross, and the warp on it is the power of the Holy Spirit, and the woof is the holy flesh woven by the Spirit, and the thread is the grace which by the love of Christ binds and unites the two in one, and the rods are the Word; and the workers are the patriarchs and prophets who weave the fair, long perfect tunic for Christ; and the Word passing through these, like the rods, completes through them that which his Father wills.
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> Hippolytus (*On Christ and the Antichrist* 4)[1]

Having surveyed the literature and explored briefly the central contention of this study, we must turn now to the subject of "the Incarnation" in Origen's thought. To understand what Origen means when he states that the Word "became flesh in the Scriptures," we must understand what Origen means by "becoming flesh" in the first place, specifically with relation to the body. How, or in what sense is the Word made flesh? When, or under what circumstances does this occur? It is easy to assume that Origen, like many modern theologians, has an understanding of the Incarnation that is fundamentally related to the nativity, or the literal birth (and gestation) of Christ.[2]

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[1] ANF 5:205; trans. modified.

[2] A glance at almost any modern theological dictionary or encyclopedia will demonstrate the assumed relationship between incarnation and nativity. The *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, for

But, as Origen scholars have long known, this is not necessarily so. Like many thinkers after him, Origen is concerned to demonstrate that the Word assumed both a human body *and* a human soul,[3] but he does not take for granted that the Word assumed both at the same time, and as a result he does not feel obligated to point to the nativity as the *singular* moment of "incarnation." Many scholars contend that Origen's alleged belief in the pre-existence of souls drastically affects his understanding of the Incarnation, such that, for him, the Word was united to the soul of Jesus long *before* his physical birth.[4]

If true, such a position naturally leads us to ask, "Which of these two unions, Word/soul or Word/flesh, defines the Incarnation in Origen's theology?" On the one hand, Crouzel uses the term "Incarnation" in the strict sense of "enfleshment," and

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example, defines "Incarnation" as "the belief that the eternal Word of God existed in the flesh as a human being *after being born*, through the power of the Holy Spirit, from the Virgin Mary" (emphasis mine). For Origen, as we shall see, this doctrine is not quite as straightforward. Gerard Ettlinger, "Incarnation," ed. Everett Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 567.

[3] See *PArch* 2.6.3. Origen's perception of divinity is such that, by nature, it could not have been united to the flesh without the medium of a soul, as souls alone are capable of union with both material and immaterial substances. Unless otherwise noted, all English quotations from *On First Principles* in this chapter are taken from Butterworth. There are occasional problems with Butterworth's edition, as we shall soon see, but I will point them out only where they become relevant and will not cite problematic passages with the standard abbreviation *PArch*.

[4] The number of scholars in this camp are far too many to name, but for a sampling, see Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886), 189–92; L. W. Barnard, "Origen's Christology and Eschatology," *Anglican Theological Review* 46 (1964): 213–19; Rowan Williams, "Origen on the Soul of Jesus," in *Origeniana Tertia* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985), 131–37; Gerald Bostock, "The Sources of Origen's Doctrine of Pre-Existence," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck/Vienna: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987); J. Nigel Rowe, *Origen's Doctrine of Subordination: A Study in Origen's Christology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1987); Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 192–93; J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Nicholas Madden, "An Aspect of Origen's Christology," in *Studies in Patristic Christology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 23–36; Paul B. Decock, "Origen: On Making Sense of the Resurrection as a Third Century Christian," *Neotestamentica* 45, no. 1 (2011): 76–91; Christopher Beeley, "'Let This Cup Pass from Me' (Matth 26:39): The Soul of Christ in Origen, Gregory Nazianzen, and Maximus Confessor," *Studia Patristica* 63 (2013): 29–43.

writes that the "Christ-man exists in the pre-existence, long *before* the Incarnation."[5] That is, one cannot speak of an incarnation until there is actual flesh involved. On the other hand, Charles Kannengiesser uses the term in a much broader sense, remarking, "We are dealing with an incarnation of the divine Logos specifically into the human soul (as such, more technically a 'soul communion' than an 'enfleshment')."[6] He thus bends the meaning of the term altogether. Yet, both Crouzel and Kannengiesser base these remarks upon the assumption that Origen forces his Christology into his broader cosmology, or upon his supposed belief in the pre-existence of souls. If we reject this assumption, however, we need not side with either of them. In this chapter, I intend to argue that we must look in the very opposite direction. For Origen, the full "union" between the soul of Jesus and the Word does not occur *prior* to his birth in some "pre-existent" state, but rather *after* it, in the midst of his humble death upon the cross. It is in the Passion that Jesus "was no longer different from the Word, but was the same with him," to borrow Origen's own terminology.[7] It is in the Passion that "the God-man" (*deus-homo*)[8] is born. While this may sound equally problematic, and indeed, adoptionist, it is important that we survey all the evidence before addressing the potential implications.

This chapter consists of three propositions. First, I will show that while Origen does not entirely divorce the nativity from his understanding of incarnation,

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[5] Crouzel, *Origen*, 192; emphasis mine.

[6] Charles Kannengiesser, "Christology," *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 77.

[7] *ComJn* 32.325. I wish to thank John Behr sincerely for first suggesting this reading of Origen to me in the context of a seminar on Origen at Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary. Some of the ideas presented in this chapter will be reflected in his edition of *On First Principles* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press), but as this work has not yet been published, I am unable to cite it.

[8] Origen's own term in *PArch* 2.6.3.

he is far more concerned to say that the birth of the God-man occurs in the death of Jesus. To borrow an image from Hippolytus (see above), the Word "weaves" flesh for himself upon the beams of the cross, and it is through his very suffering that he is fully united to a soul and body. Second, I will demonstrate that, as a result, the ontological identity of Christ *as* "God-man" rests wholly upon the cross, and furthermore that this identity is made manifest only in its light. That is, there can be no recognition of Jesus as divine Word apart from the Passion. Or, to put it in thematically appropriate terms, the "veil of the flesh" is lifted in the Passion. Finally, I will show that the cross remains central to Origen's thought even when he writes of the Word's *scriptural* enfleshment. To interpret Scripture through the lens of the cross is also to lift the "veil of the letter," revealing to the reader the divine Word of God.[9] Whether in relation to the body of Jesus or the words of the text, "becoming flesh" for Origen simply has very little meaning without the Passion. The *single* identity of the incarnate Word, whether as man or text, hangs upon the cross.

On First Principles and the Pre-Existence of Souls

Background

The essential starting point for this discussion is *On First Principles*, where Origen first sets out many of his most famous and speculative theological claims. While the exact date of *On First Principles* is unclear, we can be sure it is one of his earlier projects. Aside from a few internal references, Eusebius is the sole source of

[9] Thus, John Behr writes, "Origen's primary concern is that theological reflection should not remain at the level of the flesh, neither that of Jesus himself nor that of Scripture, its letters and their literal sense, but should penetrate these veils to discern the very Word of God." Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 169. This chapter demonstrates that to penetrate both the "veil of the flesh" and the "veil of the letter," one must look through the lens of the cross.

information. From his *Ecclesiastical History*, two important details emerge: first, that Origen composed *On First Principles* "before leaving Alexandria,"[10] and second, that he left Alexandria for Caesarea in the tenth year of the reign of Alexander Severus (r. 222–235).[11] Together, if Eusebius' account is trustworthy, these details suggest that *On First Principles* can be dated to no later than 232. More difficult is of course determining how much time elapsed between its completion and Origen's final departure from Alexandria. Internal references indicate that Origen had not yet finished the *Commentary on Genesis* when he began *On First Principles* (or perhaps the other way around), and that these two texts emerged from roughly the same period of his career.[12] As the *Commentary* was only partially complete by the time Origen left Alexandria,[13] *On First Principles* can reasonably be dated to a period in the later 220s, with an absolute terminus of 232.[14] In any event, it is important to understand that, as we shall see, many of Origen's most controversial statements are left undeveloped in this early period of his career, particularly in relation to rational souls.

As for the occasion of this work, he states, "Many … who profess to believe

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[10] Eusebius, *EH* 6.24.

[11] Ibid., 6.26.

[12] He makes several references to the *Commentary on Genesis* in *PArch*. In 2.3.6, for example, he notes that he has treated the phrase, "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth" elsewhere, presumably in the *Commentary*, but in 1.2.6, he states that he has not yet arrived at his treatment of man as "the image and likeness of God," and that he would inquire more carefully into the matter "when we come to the exposition of this passage in Genesis."

[13] In Book Nine of *ComGn*, Origen records that he wrote the first eight books while in Alexandria, suggesting that the remaining four were completed elsewhere, perhaps in Caesarea or even Athens.

[14] Nautin dates both *ComGn* and *PArch* to 229. See Pierre Nautin, *Origène: sa vie et son oeuvre*, 368–71.

in Christ, hold conflicting opinions not only on small and trivial questions but also on some that are great and important … In view of this it seems necessary first to lay down a definite line and unmistakable rule in regard to each of these, and to postpone the inquiry into other matters until afterwards."[15] As he goes on, he remarks that Christians are to believe only that which "in no way conflicts with the tradition of the church and the apostles," most of which was handed down "in unbroken succession" and "in the plainest terms."[16] What we see here is that Origen's primary concern is to lay out for his readers the bare elements of the faith, passed down straightforwardly through apostolic and ecclesial tradition. It may be for this very reason that he chooses to title his book *On First Principles*. By his own admission, his *first* intention is not to provide his readers with a series of questionable speculations, but rather to articulate the first principles of the faith, or in the words of Brian Daley, to provide "the anchor and the starting point of authentic and creative biblical interpretation."[17]

We cannot, however, ignore the very obvious fact that Origen does engage in a great deal of speculative theology. Indeed, he maintains an occasional distinction between those doctrines handed down "in the plainest terms," and certain "other

[15] *PArch* 1. Pref. 2.

[16] Ibid., 1. Pref. 2–3.

[17] Daley writes that the title "bears an ambiguity of reference Origen may well have intended: constructing a cohesive survey of the ontological principles of the world's beings, as the Christian faith perceives them, also brings together for him, the logical principles for an understanding of the content of revelation that is both the anchor and the starting point of authentic and creative biblical interpretation." "Origen's De Principiis: A Guide to the Principles of Christian Scriptural Interpretation," in *Nova et Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton*, ed. John Petruccione (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 6. Marguerite Harl and Gilles Dorival argue that this work is comparable to certain early philosophical handbooks, like that of Alcinous' *Epitome*. See M. Harl, "Structure et cohérence du *Peri Archôn*," in *Origeniana: Premier colloque international des études origéniennes*, ed. Henri Crouzel, Gennaro Lomiento, and Josep Rius-Camps (Bari: Istituto di Letteratura Cristiana Antica, 1975), 21; G. Dorival, "Remarques sur la forme du *Peri Archon*," in *Origeniana*, 34–36.

doctrines." Regarding these other doctrines, he notes that the apostles occasionally kept silent in their descriptions in order to provide more diligent thinkers with an exercise upon which to display their knowledge and wisdom.[18] Among those doctrines he considers open, or undetermined, he mentions the nature of the Holy Spirit, the incorporeality of God, and most importantly, whether the soul "is imparted to the body from without or no."[19] It is crucial to note that from the very beginning, Origen approaches the doctrine of the soul as something that is "not very clearly defined in the teaching."[20] He repeatedly insists throughout the course of this text that his speculations are not meant to be taken as authoritative, but as informed propositions or possibilities.

Still, despite Origen's stated intention, and despite his own admission of limited certainty, many commentators have persisted in viewing this text principally as a dangerous work of speculation. The charges leveled against Origen range from universalism, to reincarnation, to the belief that the devil himself would one day attain to salvation. However, it is his alleged belief in the pre-existence of souls and their subsequent "fall" into bodies that has become his greatest source of trouble. The allegation has been repeated so many times throughout history, in the very same manner, that few have even thought to challenge it until recently. Before turning to those challenges, however, let us review the traditional account of Origen's position.

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[18] *PArch* 1. Pref. 3.

[19] Ibid., 1. Pref. 5.

[20] Ibid.

Pre-existent Souls and the Descent into Flesh

Before the creation of the material world, so the narrative goes,[21] there existed a set number of bodiless intellects, or rational natures (*rationabiles naturae*), each of which was engaged in pure contemplation of God through their participation in the divine Logos.[22] However, while these intellects were created in a state of blessedness, they were under no compulsion to carry on in that state, or to maintain their unbroken contemplation (throughout his writings Origen is determined to uphold the doctrine of free will).[23] As a result, he supposedly postulates that these intellects were capable of turning away from their maker at any time, if they so desired. This they did, and Origen's description of "turning away" as a kind of "boredom" or "satiety" (*satietas*, perhaps κόρος originally) is often linked with this narrative.[24] As a result of this κόρος, these intellects allegedly "fell" from a state of absolute perfection into various degrees of imperfection, which involved two distinctive components. First, each intellect, or νοῦς, ceased to be *pure* νοῦς, and

[21] The narrative that follows is essentially the one reflected in portions of Butterworth's English translation of *On First Principles*. Problematically, Butterworth follows the critical edition of Koetschau by inserting later descriptions of Origen's theology (including the sixth-century condemnations of Origen) into the text as through Origen wrote them himself. In what follows, I will point out specific examples of these insertions, and will cite a number of contemporary scholars who continue to repeat some of the more problematic elements of this narrative. On the problems with the English translations of *On First Principles*, see Ronnie J. Rombs, "A Note on the Status of Origen's *De Principiis* in English," *Vigiliae Christianae* 61, no. 1 (2007): 21–29.

[22] Origen is often concerned to point out that rational creatures have a share in Reason himself, who is Christ. See *PArch* 1.3.8: "God the Father bestows on all the gift of existence; and a participation [*participatio*] in Christ, in virtue of his being the word or reason [*ratio*], makes them rational [*rationabiles*]."

[23] This is in part because rational beings share in Reason, and are thus capable of both virtue and wickedness. Elsewhere, however, Origen bases this belief on "the teaching of the church," and "the doctrine of the righteous judgment of God," which, according to him, demonstrates that "it lies within our own power to devote ourselves to a life worthy either of praise or of blame" (*PArch* 3.1.1).

[24] See *PArch* 1.3.8. On κὸρος and its implications, see Mark Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 92–93.

became instead ψυχή, or "soul."[25] In his work, Origen describes the transformation from νοῦς to ψυχή with the image of "growing cold" (though the relationship between this transformation and the doctrine of pre-existent souls is uncertain). He relies on a popular etymological argument of the time, namely, that the word ψυχή is a derivative of the passive verb ψύχεσθαι ("to grow cold," from ψύχόω).[26] The imagery becomes more striking when he cites those many scriptural passages which refer to God as "fire," pairing them with Jesus' words in Matthew 24:12, "Because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold." Because Origen sees Ψυχή as inferior to νοῦς, he also states that it is better suited to interact with matter.[27] As a result, Origen is accused of saying that the second component of the "fall" is the descent of these numerous souls into flesh.[28]

This second component has, with good reason, become the most problematic. Origen is often interpreted as saying that each soul was cast down into the flesh, by God, as a means of *punishment*.[29] Furthermore, so it is said, the type of flesh each

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[25] Confusingly, Origen will often refer to the νοῦς as ψυχή, citing biblical custom. It is for this reason, in part, that scholars tend to refer to Origen's doctrine of "pre-existent souls" rather than "pre-existent intellects," which would strictly be more accurate.

[26] *PArch* 2.8.3. See also Aristotle *De Anima* 1.2.405b, and Tertullian *De Anima* 25, 27.

[27] Rowan Williams uses this *nous*/*psyche* distinction to argue for Origen's belief in pre-existent souls, as *psyche*, being the "lower" form of soul, cannot be the instrument of salvation. Salvation, according to Williams, requires an agent "free of 'psychic' constraint," and in his own words, "the existence of such an individual depends strictly upon the *nous*'s condition not being determined only in and by the history of *this* world. If any *nous* is free of psychic association, there must be a supra-historical *noes*: so that if we deny the theory of pre-existence souls, there is no pure unfallen *nous*, one in 'spirit' with the Logos." Williams, "Origen on the Soul of Jesus," 134.

[28] Though this whole doctrine is often cited as example of Origen's brazen Platonism, Gerald Bostock rightly argues that much of what Origen actually says originates from Philo, who incorporates both Platonic and Jewish elements into this thinking. In Bostock's estimation, Origen perceives this to be, first and foremost, a Jewish belief. See Bostock, "The Sources of Origen's Doctrine of Pre-Existence."

[29] It is important to note that for Origen, punishment is always carried out for the sake of correction, rather than retribution. This is most evident when Origen comments on the scriptural

ψυχή received was dependent upon the severity of that particular fall. In the later words of Leontius of Byzantium:

> Some sinned deeply and became daemons, others less and became angels; others still less and became archangels; and thus each in turn received the reward for his individual sin. But there remained some souls who had not sinned so greatly as to become daemons, nor on the other hand so very lightly as to become angels. God therefore made the present world and bound the soul to the body as a punishment."[30]

In other words, Origen allegedly understands there to be an entire spectrum of flesh, or types of bodies, ranging from ethereal angelic bodies, to denser human bodies, to even denser, or perhaps colder demonic bodies. What is more, it is said that even after this fall, each individual soul could continue to move up and down the length of this spectrum by means of merit, such that angels could become men or demons, and demons could become men or angels.[31] Ultimately, no matter how far they had fallen

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language of "fire" with relation to the coming judgment. When, for example, Celsus criticizes the Christians for saying that "all the rest of mankind will be thoroughly roasted" and "they alone will survive," Origen responds by arguing that Scripture is referring specifically to a *purifying* fire, not a *tortuous* fire. It is an aid to the salvation of each individual. If it sounds as though this fire is a means of retribution, argues Origen, that is only because certain individuals need to be threatened in order to find repentance: "The Logos, accommodating himself to what is appropriate to the masses who will read the Bible, wisely utters threatening words with a hidden meaning to frighten people who cannot in any other way turn from the flood of iniquities" (*CCels* 5.15). This is precisely what occurred in Nineveh, when God had Jonah declare, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed" (Jon 3:4). The declaration sounded like a promise, but Nineveh was not actually destroyed. In the context of pre-existent souls, then (if the above narrative can be trusted), the material world would function not as a prison, but as a classroom meant for correction.

[30] *De Sectis* 10.5, trans. by Butterworth who, following Koetschau, actually inserts this passage into the text as though Origen wrote it himself. This idea of souls "falling" into bodies as punishment is still very much present in modern Origen scholarship. Manlio Simonetti, for example, remarks that "[Origen's] anthropology is based on the idea that humans are in fact heavenly beings weighed down by a material body and fallen to earth as a result of their sin." *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 46.

[31] This is described by Jerome in *Ep. ad Avitum* 4, and as with Leontius, Jerome's description is actually inserted into the translation of Butterworth (see *On First Principles* 1.7.5), leading the careless reader to believe that Origen spoke the words himself. Elsewhere (*On First Principles* 1.8.4), Butterworth includes in his translation a composite passage of Koetschau's, taken primarily from Gregory of Nyssa, and as a result Origen is made to say that "souls are supposed to have existed in a certain state before they came to live in bodies," and that each soul "became heavy and downward in motion, inhabiting human bodies because of evil; then, when its reasoning power

or how long it would take, every soul would rise back up to the pure contemplation of God, leaving behind the flesh altogether. The end would be just as the beginning, and God would be "all in all" in a doctrine often referred to as *apokatastasis*.[32]

The Soul of Jesus

The purpose of recounting this complex narrative is not to challenge it in its *entirety*, but to examine the way it affects Origen's perception of one *specific* soul: that of Jesus.[33] If accurate, the implications for Origen's understanding of "incarnation" would be considerable. Indeed, it is almost invariably with this lens that scholars have read Origen's account of the soul of Jesus and its union with the Word. In a pre-existent state, so the account goes, while every other νοῦς was falling away, or "cooling down" by varying degrees, the soul of Jesus did not waver. This solitary soul clung to the Word in act of pure love and obedience, and as a result, the two became one "in a union inseparable [*inseparabiliter*] and indissoluble

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was quenched, it dwelt among the irrational animals, and from there, when the gift of the senses was taken away, it went down into the non-sentient life of the plants, but after that, it rose up again through the same levels and was restored to its celestial abode" (*De anima et reserrectione*). Trans. Virginia W. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, FOTC 58 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 248. Though Gregory does not even mention Origen in this passage, insertions like this have led to the occasional suggestion that Origen believes in reincarnation, something he explicitly denies even within the same chapter. On the topic of reincarnation, or μετεμψύχωσις, see *CCels* 3.75 and *ComRom* 5.1.27.

[32] On *apokatastasis*, see Gotthold Muller, "Origenes und die Apokatastasis," *Theologische Geitschrift* 14 (1958): 174–90; Frederick W. Norris, "Universal Salvation in Origen and Maximus," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); David M. Kelly, "Origen: Heretic or Victim? The 'Apokatastasis' Revisited," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 18–19 (2000–2001): 273–86; Frederick W. Norris, "Apokatastasis," *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 59–62.

[33] Indeed, we do not need to argue that Origen rejects the doctrine of pre-existent souls altogether in order to discuss what he is saying about the Incarnation and the soul of Christ specifically.

[*indissociabiliter*]," to use Origen's actual phrasing.[34] The soul of Jesus and the Word were thus united long before the historical birth of Christ, and experienced in the words of Crouzel, "quite a history before that event."[35] When the appointed time came, the Word, united with the soul of Jesus, was born in the flesh. Again, Origen notes that it would have been impossible for the Word to have assumed flesh without the medium of a soul, as the nature of God is such that he cannot mingle with flesh, whereas the soul, being rational in nature, was capable of mingling with either.[36] In the traditional account then, Christ's birth, this historical and physical entrance of the Word-soul into the world, ushered in what we think of as "the Incarnation."[37] In the past, the greatest piece of evidence in favor of this reading has come from *PArch* 2.6.3, where (in Butterworth's translation) Origen writes the following:

> The only-begotten Son of God, therefore, through whom, as the course of our discussion in the previous chapters has shown, "all things visible and invisible were made," according to the teaching of Scripture both made all things and "loves what he made." For since he is the invisible "image" of the "invisible God," he granted invisibly to all rational creatures whatsoever a participation [*participatio*] in himself, in such a way that each obtained a degree of participation proportionate to the loving affection with which he had clung to him. But whereas, by reason of the faculty of free-will, variety [*varietas*] and diversity [*diversitas*] had taken hold of individual souls [*animi*], so that one was attached to its author with a warmer and another with a feebler and weaker love, that soul [*anima*] of which Jesus said, "No

[34] *PArch* 2.6.3.

[35] Crouzel, *Origen*, 192.

[36] *PArch* 2.6.3.

[37] Nicholas Madden writes, "The soul of Christ reached complete perfection in its correspondence to the Word" and "remained in 'the form of God' until he underwent the *kenosis* of the Incarnation." In other words, it is the emptying of a preexistent *soul*, rather than the Word, or the Son of God, which brings about "the Incarnation." Madden, "An Aspect of Origen's Christology," 25. Though Origen does occasionally speak in this way (*ComJn* 20.162; *CCels* 4.18), itself potential evidence for Origen's belief in the pre-existence of souls, Christopher Beeley points to a number of instances in which Origen also speaks of the Word as the subject of the *kenosis*, making it difficult to ascertain Origen's view on this matter. See Beeley, "'Let This Cup Pass from Me,'" 30, n.4.

> man taken from me my soul," clinging to God from the beginning of the creation [*ab initio creaturae*] and ever after in a union inseparable and indissoluble, as being the soul of the Wisdom and Word of God and of the Truth and the True Light, and receiving him wholly, and itself entering into his light and splendor, was made with him in a pre-eminent degree one spirit [*unus spiritus*], just as the apostle promises to them whose duty it is to imitate Jesus, that "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." This soul [*anima*], then, acting as a medium between God and the flesh (for it was not possible for the nature of God to mingle with a body part from some medium), there is born, as we said, the God-man [*deus-homo*], the medium being that existence to whose nature it was contrary to assume a body. Yet neither, on the other hand, was it contrary to nature for that soul, being as it was a rational existence, to receive God, into whom, as we said above, it had already completely entered by entering into the word and wisdom and truth.[38]

The soul of Jesus was made "in a pre-eminent degree one spirit" with the Word, and Origen goes on to apply the words of Genesis 2:24: "They shall both be in one flesh, and they are no longer two, but one flesh." These words, he argues, apply more to this union than to the union between husband and wife. Paired with the traditional account of the pre-existence of souls, this passage suggests that "the Incarnation," in a broad sense, began long before the physical birth of Christ. But, is this an accurate reading? Is Origen speaking about the pre-existence of souls in *this* passage, or is he referencing something entirely other? Despite overwhelming affirmation for this interpretation, a handful of modern scholars remain unconvinced.

In the past, one manner of deconstructing such a reading has been to point out those passages where Origen himself seems to contradict it. Mark Edwards does just that in his controversial and provocatively titled book, *Origen Against Plato*. As he considers whether or not Origen really holds to the doctrine of pre-existent souls, he notes, for example, how Origen insists that "to exist without material substance and

[38] *On First Principles* 2.6.3.

apart from any association with a bodily element is a thing that belongs only to the nature of God, that is, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[39] Edwards' point, in short, is that Origen cannot affirm to two contradictory propositions: that souls pre-exist their bodies in a state of immaterial bliss, and that no being save God can exist without a body.[40] Elsewhere, Edwards highlights Origen's belief that time came into existence only with the formation of the material world, specifically with the second day of creation. In Origen's own words, "there was not yet time before the world existed."[41] If true, Origen cannot uphold the notion of a pre-existent "history" of souls, wherein each soul had the opportunity to sin or fall into the flesh at various times.[42] Though Edwards' arguments against Origen's belief in this doctrine run deep, and go well beyond these minor inconsistences, he does not dedicate a great deal of time to the soul of Christ specifically.[43] To examine this specific soul, then, we must turn back to Origen himself, and allow our presuppositions about his teaching to be challenged.

The Cross and the Incarnation

It is important to compare what Origen writes about the union between Jesus and the Word in *On First Principles* with what he writes in his *other* important works. In doing so, we can bring to the forefront of the conversation a point that has

[39] *PArch* 1.6.4. In *PArch* 2.2.1, he also writes, "Logical reasoning compels us to believe that, while the original creation was of rational beings, it is only in idea and thought that a material substance is separable from them, and that though this substance seems to have been produced for them or after them, yet never have they lived or do they live without it."

[40] Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 94–97.

[41] *HomGn* 1.1.

[42] Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 104.

[43] Edwards covers this topic in a single page. Ibid., 93–94.

been almost entirely overlooked, if not ignored: that the inseparable union between Jesus and the Word may not, for Origen, reach its full fruition *prior* to his birth in some "pre-existent" state, but rather *after* it, in the midst of his humble death upon the cross. In other words, scholars may have been looking in the wrong direction altogether.

As a first step, however, it is essential to recognize that in *On First Principles*, Origen does not actually specify a time in which the Logos of God and the soul of Jesus were made one. He describes the nature of this union, but not the chronology or the setting.[44] Scholars are thus making an interpretive assumption when they place this passage into the grander and not entirely stable narrative of pre-existent souls.[45] In searching for the setting, then, we ought to look not to this cosmic mythology, but rather to the *scriptural* citations Origen himself utilizes in *PArch* 2.6.3. Recall that Origen specifically describes Jesus' soul as "that soul of which Jesus said, 'No man takes my soul from me.'" This reference to John 10:18 ("No man takes my soul from me, but I lay it down of myself"), brings to mind only one possible event: the Passion. Indeed, the Passion is the most specific example in the Gospels (specifically the Synoptics) where many individual souls abandoned their

[44] Origen's description of the soul of Jesus as "clinging to God from *the beginning of creation*" (*ab initio creaturae*) may appear problematic. This of course makes it sound as though Jesus' soul existed long before its embodiment. In response, Mark Edwards has pointed out that this need not be rendered, "from the beginning of the creation," as Butterworth has it. Instead, we can understand Origen simply to mean, "from the beginning of *his* creation," referring back to *ill anima, de qua dixit Iesus quia nemo aufert a me animam meam*. In other words, the soul of Jesus clung to the Word from the moment of its own origination, which Origen does not, at least here, place at any particular time. Ibid., 94.

[45] Indeed, Nicholas Madden claims, "Origen *often* speaks of the union of the Word with his humanity in the perspective of preexistence" (emphasis mine). Madden, "An Aspect of Origen's Christology," 27. But this is simply not so. In fact, as Marguerite Harl points out, the term "pre-existent souls" does not actually occur in any of Origen's works. M. Harl, "La Préexistence des âmes dans l'oeuvre d'Origène," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck/Vienna: Tyrolia, 1987), 257, n.2.

Creator. While Jesus prayed "thy will be done" in the Garden of Gethsemane, his disciples slept. While he was on trial, they denied him. While he hung upon the cross, they abandoned him. Even as he lay in the tomb, they hid themselves away.[46] In the Gospel of John, on the other hand, the very reason most remember that Jesus' mother and "the beloved disciple" remained with him is because so many others did not. There too, Peter denied him, there too the disciples locked themselves away "behind closed doors (Jn 20:19), and there of course Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea went to his body by night "for fear of the Jews" (Jn 19:38). Perhaps, then, it is the Passion Origen has in mind when he writes of Jesus' unshakeable devotion. By tentatively placing this scriptural citation at the center of our reading, we can momentarily shift the framework away from the narrative of pre-existent souls, bringing the cross to the fore.

Having done this, we can go on to a much more substantial piece of evidence, found not in *On First Principles,* but in another text altogether. Partway through Book Thirty-Two of the *Commentary on John*, Origen treats the following Gospel text: "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him immediately."[47] Naturally, Origen recognizes the Johannine theme of glorification in death,[48] but he goes on to address this theme in a way that might feel quite foreign to

[46] Of course, this would be to take the Passion in a purely historical sense. On the idea that the Passion is actually a timeless event, or in the words of Peter Gorday, that "the cross is both a contingent event on earth and a timeless reality in heaven," see Peter J. Gorday, "Becoming Truly Human: Origen's Theology of the Cross," in *The Cross in Christian Tradition: From Paul to Bonaventure*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dreyer (New York: Paulist Press, 2000); and J. A. Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 139–41.

[47] Jn 13:31–32.

[48] See Jn 12:32, 21:19.

modern ears:

> But the glory that resulted from his death for men did not belong to the only-begotten Word, which by nature does not die, nor to Wisdom and Truth, nor any of the other titles that are said to belong to the divine aspects in Jesus, but belonged to the man [ὁ ἄνθρωπος] who was also the Son of Man born of the seed of David according to the flesh. For this reason he said earlier, "Now you seek to kill me, a man who has spoken the truth to you." In the words we are examining, however, he says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified." Now I think God also highly exalted this man when he became obedient "unto death, and the death of a cross." For the Word in the beginning with God, God the Word, was not capable of being highly exalted. But the high exaltation of the Son of Man which occurred when he glorified God in his own death consisted in the fact that he was no longer different [ἕτερος] from the Word, but was the same with him. For if "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit," so that it is no longer said that "they are two" even in the case of this man and the spirit, might we not much more say that the humanity of Jesus [τὸ ἀνθρώπινος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ] became one with the Word when he who did not consider "equality with God" something to be grasped was highly exalted? The Word, however, remained in his own grandeur, or was even restored to it, when he was again with God, God the Word being man.[49]

Origen reveals here that it was the *death* of Jesus that brought about his exaltation, and, more importantly, that this exaltation consisted not merely of additional praise or glorification, but "consisted in the fact that he was no longer different [ἕτερος] from the Word."[50] Indeed, this is the first instance in which Origen ever specifies the occasion of the union between Jesus and the Word: "the humanity of Jesus became one with the Word when he who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped was highly exalted" (πῶς οὐκὶ μᾶλλον τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μετὰ τοῦ λόγου λέγοιμεν γεγονέναι ἕν, ὑπερυψωμένου μὲν τοῦ μὴ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγησαμένου τὸ

[49] *ComJn* 32.322–26.

[50] Ἡ δὲ ὑπερύψωσις τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, γενομένη αὐτῷ δοξάσαντι τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ θανάτῳ, αὕτη ἦν, τὸ μηκέτι ἕτερον αὐτὸν εἶναι τοῦ λόγου ἀλλὰ τὸν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ.

εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ).[51] This is precisely why there are such strong paschal undertones in *PArch* 2.6.3. Crucially, *On First Principles* can be interpreted in light of the *Commentary on John*, but the *Commentary on John* cannot be made to fit with the traditional reading of *On First Principles*. Unless Origen undergoes a genuine change in mind, and we will see that he does not, these two passages must be read in conjunction with one another. They must both be read in light of the cross. The implications are, of course, extraordinary. Not only has Christ "become king because he suffered the cross,"[52] but the God-man Origen describes in *On First Principles* is actually born in his own death.

Christological Dualism and the Problem of Adoptionism

Before looking at additional evidence, it would be prudent to examine what Origen is saying here, and what he is not saying. Does this reading merely reverse the problem, so that Origen is not espousing a pre-existent union, but rather some form of adoptionism or proto-Nestorianism? Does this separate the soul of Jesus from the Word to such a degree that we have two subjects, rather than one? At times, Origen appears to affirm just that. For example, he claims in *Contra Celsus* that it was not Jesus who said "I am the way, the truth, and the life," but the Logos that spoke "in Jesus" (ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ).[53] In Origen's own words: "The *logos* and essence of

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[51] Emphasis mine. In the past, the relationship between this passage and *PArch* 2.6.3 has simply been shrugged off as yet another of Origen's self-contradictions. J. Nigel Rowe writes, "We can only comment that in suggesting that the human nature of Christ was not perfectly united with his divinity until the passion and resurrection, Origen is not consistent with his general outlook, which is that the human soul of Christ, which became incarnate, was indissolubly united to the Word of God, in its pre-existent state." *Origen's Doctrine of Subordination*, 201.

[52] *ComJn* 1.278.

[53] *CCels* 2.9. Passages like this one have also led Rowe to remark, "In fact, during the incarnate life of Christ the Divine Nature was in control all the time, operating the human nature in a way in which a marionette is operated." He goes on: "In fact, it is not really true that the Word became

the [divine] being in Jesus is quite a different matter from that of his human aspect" (ἄλλος δή που ὁ περὶ τούτου καὶ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ λόγος ἐστὶ παρὰ τὸν περὶ τοῦ νοουμένου κατὰ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀνθρώπου), and "none of us is so idiotic as to say that the Life died, or that the Resurrection died."[54] But he takes what appears to be the opposite position in *On First Principles*, where he remarks that the soul and body of Jesus can right be called the "Son of God," and that "the Son of God is said to have died, in virtue of that nature which could certainly admit of death."[55] Articulating what is often referred to as the *communicatio idiomatum*, he states, "And for this reason, throughout the whole of Scripture, while the divine nature is spoken of in human terms the human nature is in its turn adorned with marks that belong to the divine prerogative."[56]

While these statements may sound contradictory, they are actually quite consistent. When Origen writes of "Jesus" and "the Word," he is not referring to two beings, but to two natures that, at least prior to the Passion, can be *contemplated* apart from one another. Origen will later insist that "the relation of the soul of Jesus to the firstborn of all creation, the divine Logos, is not that of two separate beings" (οὐκ εἰσὶ δύο ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πρὸς τὸν « πάσης κτίσεως » πρωτότοκον θεὸν

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flesh: the Word of God, according to Origen, simply disguises himself as a person made up of flesh and bones so as to enable those capable of it to penetrate beneath the imposter and discover the real person." Ibid., 121–23.

[54] *CCels* 7.16; modified Chadwick. We might also render it, "The *logos* and essence of the [divine] being in Jesus is quite different from the man whom the mind discerns in Jesus."

[55] *PArch* 2.6.3.

[56] Ibid.

λόγον).[57] From Jesus' very conception, Origen perceives only one active subject. He thus exclaims, "But of all the marvelous and splendid things about him there is one that utterly transcends the limit of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence … how the Wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a little child and uttered noises like those of crying children."[58] The Wisdom of God does not unite himself *to* a little child, but is born *as* a little child. The nativity retains significance, and it cannot be entirely divorced from Origen's conception of incarnation. In the Passion, then, Origen is not speaking of the Word "adopting" the man Jesus, but of the abolishment of perceptible distinctions ("Jesus was no longer different from the Word, but was the same with him"). His divinity does not swallow up his humanity, but one can no longer contemplate them apart from one another. There is a sense in which the Passion actually brings about the end of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Through the cross, what was once a mere exchange of properties becomes a true and inseparable union.[59]

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[57] *CCels* 6.47.

[58] *PArch* 2.6.2. In *HomLc* 7.6 he asks, "If only a man had been in Mary's womb and not the Son of God, how could it happen—both at that time and now—that many diseases are cured, not only of bodies but also of souls?", and he describes this time in the womb even more graphically in *HomLc* 14.8: "In his mother's womb he saw the uncleanness of bodies. He was walled in on both sides by her innards; he bore the straits of earthly dregs."

[59] Commenting on this problem, Christopher Beeley argues that, for Origen, the *communicatio idiomatum* is nothing more than a "conventional practice of biblical language," but one which "signifies neither a real sharing of attributes nor a singularity of subject to which both sets of statements apply." Beeley, "'Let This Cup Pass from Me,'" 32. In other words, Origen is perfectly content to follow the scriptural *custom* of applying the same action or attribute to both natures, but this custom does not portray reality. In reality, the divinity of Christ always remains distinctive from his humanity, and Origen cannot genuinely affirm, for example, that the Son of God dies. In fact, Beeley points specifically to Origen's treatment of the Passion as evidence, noting it is there he most forcefully maintains a "hermeneutical distinction" of natures, and that "Origen's Christology is essentially dualist." Ibid., 32, 35. Admittedly, some of Origen's language would be problematic were it to appear in the context of later Christological debates, but Beeley has it backwards on the role of the Passion. It is in his treatment of the Passion that Origen actually erases any "hermeneutical distinction" there might be. In light of the cross, it is no longer possible to contemplate Jesus and the Word apart from one another. To put it simply, the Passion is not the problem, but rather the solution to the question of "two subjects."

We might also address this problem by pointing to Origen's analogy of iron placed in a fire, whereby the iron gradually takes on the properties of the fire. In *PArch* 2.6.5–6, he states that the soul of Christ, "like iron in the fire, was placed in the Word forever, in Wisdom forever, is God in all that it does, feels, and understands," and that its "firmness of purpose and immensity of affection and inextinguishable warmth of love destroyed all thought of alteration or change, such that what was dependent upon the will (*arbitrium*) is now changed into nature (*natura*) by the exertion of long usage." It is true that Origen sees the union between the natures as something that occurs gradually, or that strengthens over time. In his *Homilies on Luke*, he even speaks of a kind of reverse *kenosis*, such that "he filled up what he had emptied out" (*id quod vacuefecerat*, *adimplevit*) and "he took back what he had lost and was filled with those virtues that he had seemed to leave behind a little earlier, when he took on a body" (*id, quod amiserat*, *resumebat et replebatur virtutibus*, *quas paulo ante assumpto corpore visus fuerat relinquere*).[60] Origen's analogy is thus quite apt, and aids in understanding how a union that exists from birth can still attain to fuller fruition. To explain this, we might borrow the words of Gregory of Nyssa, who holds a similar position with relation to the Passion: "the Right Hand of God, who made all things that are, who is the Lord by whom all things were made and without whom nothing that is subsists, *himself raised to his own height the human being united to him, making him also, by the commixture, to be what he is by nature*."[61] Gregory is quite careful with his language, just as Origen is with his.

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[60] *HomLc* 18.1, 20.6. On this notion of reverse *kenosis*, see Joseph Lienhard, "Christology in Origen's Homilies on the Infancy Narrative in Luke," *Studia Patristica* 26 (1993): 290–91.

[61] *Contra Eunomium* 3.3.44; emphasis mine. Indeed, Gregory actually states directly prior to this that this exaltation occurred in the Passion (3.3.43), demonstrating that Origen is not alone in making such claims. For more on the parallels between Origen and Gregory on this point, see John

Though Origen's way of describing what occurred in the Passion may sound unsatisfactory to those living after the fifth-century Christological debates, it is important to understand that Origen is not saying the nativity has no importance, or that there is no sense of union or incarnation until the cross. Furthermore, he is not saying that there are two separate beings, Jesus and the Word, acting separately from one another. Rather, in light of the Passion, we can no longer differentiate between divine and human properties:

> When, therefore, we see in him some things so human that they appear in no way to differ from the common frailty of mortals, and some things so divine that they are appropriate to nothing else but the primal and ineffable nature of deity, the human understanding with its narrow limits is baffled, and struck with amazement at so mighty a wonder knows not which way to turn, what to hold to, or whither to betake itself. If it thinks of God, it sees a man; if it thinks of a man, it beholds one returning from the dead with spoils after vanquishing the kingdom of death. For this reason we must pursue our contemplation with all fear and reverence, as we seek to prove how the reality of each nature exists in one and the same [individual][62] [*ut in uno eodemque ita utriusque naturae veritas demonstretur*], in such a way that nothing unworthy or unfitting may be thought to reside in that divine and ineffable existence, nor on the other hand may the events of his life be supposed to be the illusions caused by deceptive fantasies.[63]

Additional Evidence

The *Commentary on John* passage (32.322–326) is undeniably significant, but is it enough to overturn the traditional reading of *On First Principles*? To strengthen the argument, I will present three additional pieces of evidence before addressing the wider impact on the enfleshment of Christ, specifically in Scripture.

Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 436–55.

[62] Butterworth has "person," but this term does not appear in the Latin and might be misleading as a result of its theological connotations.

[63] *PArch* 2.6.2.

Contra Celsus and the "Economy of Suffering"

Apart from *On First Principles* and the *Commentary on John*, Origen also discusses the union between Jesus and the Word on at least two separate occasions in *Contra Celsus*. Indeed, he repeatedly affirms in Book Six that "the soul of Jesus was united by a supreme participation with the majesty of the Son of God," and that "no separation is to be made between the soul of Jesus and the firstborn of all creation"[64] However, the most critical passage is found in Book Two, where he writes the following:

> When we say [that the Logos was not confined only to the body of Jesus, but remained omnipresent], we do not separate the Son of God from Jesus. For after the Incarnation [οἰκονομία] the soul and body of Jesus became very closely united with the Logos of God. According to Paul's teaching "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and every one who has understood what it means to be joined to the Lord and has actually been joined to him is one spirit with the Lord. If so, then how much more is it true that in a superior and more divine way that which was at one time a composite being in relation to the Logos of God is one with Him" [πῶς οὐ πολλῷ μᾶλλον θειοτέρως καὶ μειζόνως ἕν ἐστι τὸ ποτε σύνθετον πρὸς τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ;]?[65]

Curiously, Origen says here that the union occurred *after the economy*, which Henry Chadwick renders, "after the Incarnation." Upon first glance, it might appear as though Origen has pushed the time of the union back even further, such that it takes place after Jesus' earthly ministry altogether.[66] However, interpreting Origen rightly

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[64] *CCels* 6.47, 48.

[65] Ibid., 2.9.

[66] Adding to the confusion, Rowe claims that in a passage in the *Commentary on Romans* (1.6), "the man Christ Jesus is explicitly stated not to have been made equal to the Son of God till after the Resurrection," bringing in yet another possible timeline. But this is not quite accurate. Origen's actual words are as follows: "It is not difficult to perceive how he who is said to have been made from David's seed according to the flesh is, from the resurrection from the dead, the Son of God. The resurrection is indeed the end of Christ's sufferings, and because after resurrection 'he dies not again and death will no longer have dominion over him'; and it also says, 'even though we knew Christ according to the flesh, now we know him no longer in that way'; therefore everything that is in Christ

hinges upon interpreting οἰκονομία rightly. In this context, the word is yet another reference to the Passion. When Origen utilizes the term "economy," or "dispensation," with reference to the activity of Christ, he does so in two distinctive ways. The first is what he calls "the economy of flesh" (*dispensatio carnis*), which is essentially a reference to the entirety of Christ's time on earth prior to his Passion, from his birth, to his childhood, to his adult ministry. Origen thus remarks that though Christ was God by nature, he "became flesh in the economy,"[67] and when treating the passage in the Gospel of Luke regarding Jesus' purification in the temple, he states that "Jesus, *in the economy of flesh*, was purified by an offering."[68] This sense of the word is thus broad, reflecting the overarching act of becoming flesh and living as a human.

On the other hand, Origen uses οἰκονομία in a much narrower sense when he refers to what he calls "the economy of suffering" (ἡ κατὰ τὸ πάθος οἰκονομία). This usage is most common throughout the *Commentary on John*, and is a reference to Christ's Passion only. As Origen begins Book Thirty-Two, for example, he writes of the Last Supper and Judas' approaching betrayal, stating that Jesus rose up from the supper because he knew that "the economy of suffering was approaching."[69] Throughout the rest of the book, he goes on to declare that this economy "was to

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is now the Son of God." In this passage, Origen does not say that Jesus is *not* equal to the Son of God until *after* the resurrection, but that after the resurrection, Jesus *is* the Son of God, precisely because the resurrection is "the end of Christ's sufferings." Put simply, it is this suffering that brings about the union, and when this suffering is complete, Jesus *is* the Son of God. See Rowe, *Origen's Doctrine of Subordination*, 201.

[67] *FragmLc* 122.

[68] *HomLc* 14.6; emphasis mine.

[69] *ComJn* 32.25.

bring salvation to the world,"[70] that Jesus wished for it "to be imminent, and not to tarry,"[71] that through it "the Son was about to reveal the Father,"[72] and that the disciples could not experience it with him.[73] The economy of suffering, then, is not a reference to the whole of Jesus' earthly life and ministry, but to his suffering and death alone. While both uses of this word are related to the work of Christ, the economy of suffering is what de Lubac refers to as "the economy par excellence."[74]

Ultimately, it is the second usage Origen has in mind in *Contra Celsus*. This is certain because he uses the very same terminology in *ComJn* 32.325, where he writes that in Jesus' death, the Son of Man "was no longer different from the Word." It is no coincidence that immediately prior to this, he declares that "*the beginning of the economy* wherein Jesus was to die" was being actualized,[75] making it abundantly clear that the specific οἰκονομία he is referring to begins not with Jesus' birth, but with his approaching death. In *Contra Celsus*, then, there can be no doubt of his intended meaning. It is not "Incarnation," as Chadwick has it, but rather "Passion," further justifying this new reading of *On First Principles*. As a further point, "after the economy" simply cannot mean "before the birth of Jesus," making this *Contra Celsus* text terribly problematic for the traditional reading of *PArch* 2.6.3.[76]

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[70] Ibid., 32.295.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 32.359.

[73] Ibid., 32.391.

[74] Henri De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 97.

[75] *ComJn* 32.320; emphasis mine.

[76] *PEuch* 26.4 is another important piece of evidence, where Origen states, "In light of this the one who wishes heaven to be the Savior and earth the church, and who says that heaven is the First Born of all creation on whom the Father rests as on a throne, will find that it is the Man, whom he put

"He Who Is Joined to the Lord is One Spirit"

The second piece of evidence is the overt pattern of scriptural citations Origen utilizes in *On First Principles*, the *Commentary on John*, and *Contra Celsus*. In each case, after describing the close and inseparable union between Jesus and the Word, Origen repeats the same scriptural argument, rooted primarily in Paul's teaching on fornication and the body in 1 Corinthians 6:15–20. There, Paul uses the phrase, "the two shall become one flesh" in order to make two distinctive points: first, that immoral sexual union, such as that with a prostitute, is a grave and binding sin committed not only against the body itself, but against the Lord who dwells within it, and second, that Christians are actually meant to seek this kind of binding union with *the Lord* above all others, for "whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her … but anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." It is to this latter point that Origen repeatedly turns in his discussion of Jesus and the Word. In the death of Christ, not only have the two "become one" in the absolute fullest sense, but they have specifically become "one spirit." I present here the relevant excerpts, taken from our three key texts:

On First Principles:

> [Thus] … that soul of which Jesus said, "No man taketh from me my soul," clinging to God from the beginning of creation and ever after in a union inseparable and indissoluble … was made with him in a pre-eminent degree one spirit, just as the apostle promises to them whose duty it is to imitate Jesus, that "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." … For to this more than to anything else can the passage of

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on, when he had been made that power's own through humbling himself and becoming obedient to death, that said after the resurrection, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.' This is because the Man corresponding to the Savior received authority over the things in heaven as things belonging to the Only Begotten, so that he might share with him, being mingled with his divinity and united with him."

> Scripture be applied, "They shall both be in one flesh, and they are no longer two, but one flesh." For the Word of God is to be thought of as being more "in one flesh" with his soul than a man is with his wife. Moreover what could more appropriate be "one spirit" with God than this soul, which joined itself so firmly in love to God as to be worthy of being called "one spirit" with him?"[77]

Commentary on John:

> But the high exaltation of the Son of Man which occurred when he glorified God in his own death consisted in the fact that he was no longer different from the Word, but was the same with him. For if "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit," so that it is no longer said that "they are two" even in the case of this man and the spirit, might we not much more say that the humanity of Jesus become one with the Word when he who did not consider "equality with God" something to be grasped was highly exalted?[78]

Contra Celsus:

> When we say this, we do not separate the Son of God from Jesus. For after the [economy] the soul and body of Jesus became very closely united with the Logos of God. According to Paul's teaching "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and everyone who has understood what it means to be joined to the Lord and has actually been joined to him is one spirit with the Lord. If so, then how much more is it true that in a superior and more divine way that which was at one time a composite being in relation to the Logos of God is one with him?[79]

In each of these passages, Origen presents the same three-step argument. First, he identifies the nature and cause of the union. Second, to give that union further biblical and theological weight, he applies the phraseology of Paul in 1 Cor 6:17: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Finally, whether explicitly or implicitly, he argues that the phrase, "the two shall become one" is applicable more to this union than to any other, including that of a husband or wife. This repeated pattern leaves us with little doubt that Origen is speaking of the *same* union in each text. If the locus of

[77] *PArch* 2.6.3–4.

[78] *ComJn* 32.325–326.

[79] *CCels* 2.9.

the union is the Passion in even one of them, as in the *Commentary on John*, it is almost certainly the locus in all of them.

The Perception of Christ

The final piece of evidence is the way Origen speaks about the physical *perception* of Christ, both before and after the Passion. In light of the above, we should expect Origen to maintain a distinction between Jesus' humanity and his divinity prior to the crucifixion, as the union was not yet "complete." Theoretically, those around him would have seen only a man, rather than "the God-man." Not surprisingly, this is just what we find in the *Homilies on Luke*:

> Not everyone who laid eyes on him was able to see him. They saw his body, but insofar as he was Christ, they could not see him. But his disciples saw him and beheld the greatness of his divinity[80] … Neither Pilate nor Judas saw Christ as Christ. Nor did the crowd which pressed around him. Only those whom Jesus judged worthy of beholding him really saw him.[81]

In this passage, Origen does not state that Jesus and the Word were *separate* from one another, as though there are two subjects. Rather, he makes a statement about the human perception of Christ prior to his Passion. Because Jesus was not yet "the same" with the Word, it was possible to look at him and see nothing more than a man. Although he chose to reveal his divinity to a select few, or to "those whom Jesus judged worthy," that divinity was not yet wholly and permanently manifest in

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[80] Contrary to what we might expect, this is not a reference specifically to the Transfiguration. In this homily, Origen is discussing the ability of non-corporeal beings like angels to choose to be seen at will. He then writes, "I think we should understand something similar of Christ, too, when he was in the body" (*HomLc* 3.3). Indeed, Origen does not mention the Transfiguration as evidence at all, but rather Jesus' words to Philip: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

[81] *HomLc* 3.3–4. In an earlier homily, Origen similarly argues that though the apostles were capable of seeing "the Word," it was not because they had seen his body. "If seeing Jesus' body meant seeing God's Word, then Pilate, who condemned Jesus, saw God's Word; so did Judas the traitor and all those who cried out, 'Crucify him, crucify him, remove such a one from the earth" (*HomLc* 1.4).

the flesh. As Origen will make clear, that changed in the Passion.

In one of his countless criticisms of Christianity, Celsus complains that if Jesus really had been raised from the dead, he should have appeared to anyone and everyone, rather than to a handful of his closest followers. Origen provides an unusual rebuttal. Rather than falling back on Jesus' words to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe,"[82] Origen claims that Jesus chose not to appear to the multitudes out of *compassion*. Their eyes were not capable of seeing him:

> Accordingly, as we hold that Jesus was such a wonderful person, not only as to the divinity within him which was hidden from the multitude, but also as to his body which was transfigured when he wished and before whom he wished, we affirm that everyone had the capacity to see Jesus only when he had not 'put off the principalities and powers' and had not yet died to sin; but after he had put off principalities and powers, all those who formerly saw him could not look upon him, as he no longer had anything about him that could be seen by the multitude. For this reason it was out of consideration for them that he did not appear to all after the rising from the dead. And why do I say to all? For not even with the apostles themselves and the disciples was he always present or always apparent, because they were unable to receive his divinity without some periods of relief … In fact, perhaps he avoided appearing to all simply because he was considering the mean abilities of people who had not the capacity to see him.[83]

Once more, Origen recognizes the change that took place in the Passion. Jesus' divinity had been "hidden from the multitude," but only "when he had not put off the principalities and powers, and had not yet died to sin." Once he had done these things, his divinity was made permanently manifest in his humanity. No longer could the average person look upon him, because their eyes were not capable of looking upon God. For Origen, then, one's perception of Christ actually changes as a result of

[82] See Jn 20:29.

[83] *CCels* 2.64–65, 67.

his death and resurrection.

This final point is especially important in relation to the meaning of "incarnation" or "becoming flesh," because it highlights the fact that the union which occurred on the cross was not only a union of Word and soul, but of Word and flesh. Recall that in *Conra Celsus*, Origen states that "the soul *and body* of Jesus became very closely united with the Logos of God,"[84] and in *On First Principles*, he writes that the soul of Jesus should be called the Son of God and Wisdom of God "*along with that flesh which it has taken*."[85] This is not just a "soul communion," as Kannengieser would suggest, but a true enfleshment. Ultimately, it is this singular point we must come away with, because it demands that we rethink Origen's entire concept of "incarnation." There is a genuine sense in which he can speak of the Word as "incarnate" from birth, but it is more accurate to speak of the Word as "incarnate" through the cross.[86] Furthermore, the identity of Christ *as* "God-man" is made manifest only in light of the cross, as seen in the above *Contra Celsus* passage. The cross lifts the "veil of the flesh." Aside from specific moments in the Gospels when Jesus judged someone "worthy," there is simply no recognition of Jesus as divine Word, physically or noetically, apart from the Passion. All of this points to one very

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[84] *CCels* 2.9; emphasis mine.

[85] 2.6.3; emphasis mine. In *CCels* 3.41 he states, "We affirm that his mortal body and the human soul in him received the greatest elevation not only by communion but by union and intermingling, so that by sharing in His divinity he was transformed into God. If anyone should take offense because we say this even of his body, let him consider what is asserted by the Greeks about matter, that properly speaking it is without qualities, but is clothed with qualities such as the Creator wishes to give it, and that often it puts aside its former qualities and receives better and different ones. If this is right, why is it remarkable that by the providence of God's will the mortal quality of Jesus' body should have been changed into an ethereal and divine quality?"

[86] Thus, when Peter Gorday writes, "For Origen, the meaning of the cross must be set against the backdrop of the Incarnation itself," he is not wrong, but the opposite is truer. The meaning of the Incarnation must be set against the backdrop of the cross. "Becoming Truly Human," 110.

simple, yet profound truth: that for Origen, the Passion lies at the very heart of the Incarnation. The Word became flesh on the cross, and as a result, we should expect to find similar themes when Origen writes that the Word became flesh in the Scriptures.

Before turning to the Scriptures, however, it is important here to combat the notion, popular since at least the time of de Faye in the 1920s, that the cross has no real place in Origen's thought, or that he is mildly embarrassed by it.[87] Based on the evidence presented in this chapter, such notions are simply false. The cross lies at the very heart of his Christology. Indeed, without the cross, there is no Christology at all, and no Christ for that matter. Without Christ, there is no Christianity. Origen himself sums up the importance of the cross best in his *Homilies on Leviticus*, exclaiming:

> For when [Christ] was suspended on the wood, the dispensation of the flesh was finished; rising from the dead, he ascended to heaven where again his fiery nature is evident. And from this place, the Apostle said, "Even if we have known Christ according to the flesh, now we no longer know him thus." For indeed, the whole burnt offering of his flesh which was offered through the wood of the cross united the earthly with the heavenly, the human with the divine.[88]

Through the cross, all that is human is united with all that is divine, not only in the person of Christ, but in the whole of the cosmos. Through its wood, earth is united with heaven. As we turn to the subject of the Scriptures, we will discover the importance of this wood once more: "For I say that the Law, when uncomprehended, is bitter water, but when the wood of Jesus enters and the teaching of my savior

[87] See de Faye, *Origen and His Work*, 135–41. For an impressive array of scholars who are in agreement with de Faye (among them Völker, Lebreton, Wintersig, Nygren, Kelber, and others) see Rowe, *Origen's Doctrine of Subordination*, 209–10.

[88] *HomLev* 1.4.5.

dwells, the Law of Moses is sweetened and becomes most pleasant when it is read and known."[89]

The Passion and the Veil of the Letter

Comparable to the bodily Incarnation, there are times in which Origen speaks as though Scripture is only the "flesh of the Word" if and when it is read or interpreted in light of the cross. For example, in the *Homilies on Numbers*, he states that his audience should "look to the true lamb, the 'lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,'"[90] and that they should affirm with Paul, "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed."[91] He then remarks, "What we are now saying is the flesh of the Word of God, but *only* if we set it forth not as 'vegetables' for the weak'" (*Hoc quod modo loquimur, carnes sunt Verbi Dei, si tamen non quasi infirmus olera*).[92] The implication is that to speak of Christ as the Lamb who has been *sacrificed* is to encounter the enfleshed Word, but neglecting to do so, or doing so in a watered-down manner, leaves only "vegetables."[93] Once more, it is through the cross that the Word is "incarnate." But this point is not something Origen emphasizes with much frequency. For him, the more fundamental point is that it is the Passion which lifts

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[89] *HomJer* 10.2.2.

[90] Jn 1:29.

[91] 1 Cor 5:7.

[92] *HomNum* 23.6; emphasis mine.

[93] Here the differentiation is between "flesh" and "vegetables." In *ComJn* 10.103–4, however, Origen will differentiate between consuming scripture ("the flesh of the Lamb") raw versus eating it cooked. To eat it raw is to read the scriptures at the level of the letter, whereas eating it cooked entails reading it Christologically. We will explore this point further in Chapter Five.

the "veil of the letter," just as it lifted the "veil of the flesh" in relation to the body of Christ.[94]

In the opening passage of the *Homilies on Leviticus*, a passage we will return to repeatedly, Origen states that when the Word of God was brought to humans through Mary, as well as through Moses and the prophets, it was not brought without proper "garments." He writes, "For just as there it was covered with the veil of the flesh, so here with the veil of the letter." For Origen, the "veil of the letter" is symbolized most particularly by the temple curtain, which concealed the Holy of Holies. It is therefore not without significance for Origen that in describing the moment of Jesus' death, the author of the Gospel of Matthew writes, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split" (Mt 27:51). Similarly, both Mark and Luke record that "the curtain of the temple was torn in two" (Mk 15:38; Lk 23:44–45). Not surprisingly, then, Origen equates the tearing of the temple curtain with the opening up of the Scriptures, which only occurs in the context of Christ's death:

> But, when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came, upholding all things by the word of His power, a sign was given at His Passion that the things which were concealed in secrets and mysteries were now to be brought into the light and come to manifestation. For the veil of the Temple, by which the hidden and secret parts of the Holies were curtained off, was rent from the top to the bottom, thus openly declaring to all men that that which had been formerly concealed within could now be seen.[95]

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[94] With reference to the account of Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Behr writes, "It is as the crucified and risen one that he opens up the hidden sense of Scripture, the Word of God embodied in the Gospel. The full revelation of the Word of God occurs through the saving death of Christ." *Way to Nicaea*, 173.

[95] *ComCt* 2.8. In *FragmLc* 251, Origen also writes, "It is likely that the event also suggests something else to us: that the hidden things of the Law were revealed in Christ through his Passion. For, the concealing veil hung within the Holy of Holies of this age. The shadow of the Law had to be lifted. It was torn off and shows that the Holy of Holies was opened to those justified by faith in Christ."

For those who possess the capacity to see it, Christ's Passion reveals his divinity not only in the body, but also in the Scriptures. Not unlike Christ's resurrected body, only some will have the capability to look upon Scripture as the divine Word of God, even after the curtain has been torn. Indeed, Origen will occasionally speak as though the "veil" lies not over the text, but over the eyes of the individual reader. And yet even then, this veil is stripped away through the death of Christ:

> This is what he says: "Even if you do not understand these words in the present time, at the time of salvation, when you are perfectly converted to me and are stripped of the veil that I strip from you in the Passion itself, you will put your ignorance aside and understand them. You will see the symbol of it: the veil of the temple torn asunder.[96]

As with the body of Christ, the "lifting of the veil" is both a singular event and an individualized one. The Passion manifests the divine Word, but each individual must yet strive to arrive at a state in which they are capable of perceiving it. We will explore the theme of individualized perception in much greater detail in the next chapter, but the parallel here is clear. Whether as man or text, the *single* incarnate Word of God is made manifest through the cross.[97]

Elsewhere, Origen will speak of the cross as that which gives Scripture "power," making it known throughout the whole earth. In his *Homilies on Jeremiah*, for example, he teaches that Christ himself speaks through the prophet in the following words: "Like a lamb without evil who is led to be sacrificed, I did not know. They have plotted a scheme against me, saying: 'Come and let us put wood

[96] *FragmLc* 151. This personal veil is also reflected in *CCels* 4.50: "Furthermore, had the law of Moses contained within it nothing to be interpreted as containing hidden meaning, the prophet would not have said to God in his prayer, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may understand thy wonders out of thy law.' Here he knew that there is a veil of ignorance lying upon the heart of those who read and do not understand the allegorical meaning."

[97] In *ComCt* 2.8.9, Origen *equates* the temple curtain with the flesh of Christ (following Hebrews 10:20), writing, "and the veil which is in the Holy of Holies and by which those divine and secret things were covered, is his flesh."

into his bread, and let us erase him from the land of the living, that his name be no longer remembered.'"[98] In his homily, Origen takes the "wood" to be an overt reference to the cross. His enemies plot against him, to crucify him. But paradoxically, notes Origen, the cross only increases Christ's power,[99] which is just as true of the Scriptures as it is of the historical Christ:

> The bread of Jesus is the word in which we are nourished ... The wood which has been put into his bread has made the bread greater. Let me take an example from the Law of Moses: The wood which was put into the bitter water made it sweet. So the wood of the Passion of Jesus Christ when it entered into the word has made its bread sweeter. In fact, before the wood entered into his bread, when it was bread alone and there was no wood in his teaching, his voice did not go out upon all the earth. But since the bread through the wood which was put into it received power, on account of this the word of his teaching has occupied the entire inhabited world. And then the wood was a symbol of the Passion of Jesus through which the bitter water becomes sweet. For I say that the Law, when uncomprehended, is bitter water, but when the wood of Jesus enters and the teaching of my Savior dwells, the Law of Moses is sweetened and becomes most pleasant when it is read and known.[100]

In this passage too, it is the cross that lifts the veil, or makes the Law comprehensible. Like the water, it is "bitter" when it is not understood, but this changes through the Passion, when it becomes "most pleasant." Here, however, the death of Christ also does a good deal more. It also makes the bread, or the Scriptures "greater," makes them "sweeter," and gives them "power." Indeed, it is through the cross that "the word of his teaching has occupied the entire inhabited world." For Origen, the cross therefore acts also as the *herald* of the divine Logos, causing his words to go out into all the earth, and demanding that each individual search for him

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[98] Jer 11:19 (LXX).

[99] He cites Jn 12:24, "Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

[100] *HomJr* 10.2.2.

through those words. Without the cross, the body of Jesus is perceived only as a body, and the text of Scripture only as a text. But when the "wood of the Passion of Jesus Christ" enters, the whole world must reckon with the figure of Christ, who is the divine Word of God.

As a final point, Origen notes that in the Passion, it is not the humanity of *Jesus* alone that is united with his divinity, but the whole of human nature: "For Christians see that with Jesus, human and divine nature began to be woven together, so that by fellowship with divinity human nature might become divine, not only in Jesus, but also in all those who believe and go on to undertake the life which Jesus taught."[101] To describe this union, Origen will even use the same imagery of marriage, and the uniting of two souls. In his tenth *Homily on Genesis*, for example, he comments on the fact that Isaac and Rebecca first meet at a well, as do Jacob and Rachel. These "wells," Origen claims, represent Scripture, and the marriages that follow represent the union of the soul with the Word of God. After quoting 1 Corinthians 6:17 yet again ("for he who joins himself to the Lord is one Spirit"), he writes: "But it is certain that this union of the soul with the Word cannot come about otherwise than through instruction in the divine books, which are figuratively called wells. If anyone should come to these and draw from these waters … he will find a marriage worthy of God; for his soul is united with God."[102] In short, all the language Origen uses about the union between the soul of Jesus and the Word can be applied equally to "all those who believe" and "anyone" who would come. The Passion therefore opens a direct pathway to union with the divine Word for *all* Christians,

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[101] *CCels* 3.28.

[102] *HomGn* 10.5.

and that pathway is itself nothing other than the same divine Word, incarnate in the Scriptures.

In this chapter, we have seen that for Origen, the single identity of the incarnate Word of God, whether as man or text, hangs upon the cross. It is the cross that "lifts the veil" of both flesh and letter, thereby allowing the reader to interpret the Scriptures spiritually, or noetically. Of course, recognizing the importance of the Passion alone is not enough to grasp the full meaning of every scriptural passage. For Origen, this requires careful spiritual, or noetic readings with the direct aid of the Holy Spirit.[103] But it is the lens of the Passion that allows for such "spiritual" readings in the first place. When the veil has been lifted, and the divine Word recognized, the true task of exegesis can begin. In the next chapter, we will look at what the "veil of the letter" itself consists of, because for Origen, that veil is equivalent to the "flesh" of the Word. He is clothed in it, and it not only conceals him, but also makes him known. Not unlike this chapter, we will begin with an examination of the body of Christ, before moving to the way in which the words and phrases of Scripture act *as* a body.

[103] Thus Origen writes, "I think that probably not even in the coming of Jesus or his Incarnation do we learn what is perfect and complete. Even though he is already led to the cross and perfected in all things, and even though he is raised from the dead, this does not disclose to us through him the entirety of what is perfect. We still have need of another who uncovers and reveals everything to us" (*HomJos* 3.2).

CHAPTER THREE

A GARMENT OF NAMES: THE *EPINOIAI* AND THE FLESH OF CHRIST

> Let us give thanks to him who has put on the names of body parts:
> He has named for himself ears, to teach that he hears us.
> He has designated for himself eyes, to show that he sees us.
> He has only put on the names of things:
> Though in his essence he has neither anger nor regret,
> He has put on their names for our weakness.
>
> *Refrain: Blessed is he who has appeared to our humanity in all images!*
>
> Let us understand: if he had not put on the names
> Of these very things, he would have been unable to speak
> With our humanity. With [what is ours], he drew near to us.
> He put on our names, to put on us
> His way of life. He borrowed and put on our form,
> And like a father with children, he spoke with our childishness.
>
> This image of ours he put on and yet did not put [it] on,
> Stripped it off and yet did not strip it off—putting it on, stripping it off.
> He put it on as an aid, and stripped it off in exchange [for another].
> Stripping off and putting on every image,
> He taught that none were the image of his essence.
> Though hidden in his essence, he depicted himself through revealed things.
>
> Ephrem the Syrian (*Hymns on Faith* 31.1–3)[1]

There has been a certain degree of confusion over the question of the *reality* of the scriptural incarnation in Origen's work. Can it really be termed an "incarnation," or is his language merely figural? Hans Boersma, for example, writes, "It seems to me that the 'incarnations' in Scripture and in the soul can only be termed

[1] Trans. Jeffrey T. Wickes, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Faith*, FOTC 130 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 192–93.

'incarnations' in an analogical sense.'[2] Even de Lubac, who spends considerable time on the subject and presses the point further than many others, notes, "Origen does not speak in so many words of an 'incarnation' of the Logos in the Sacred Book."[3] But if this is so, why have others been so confident in claiming just the opposite? Mark Sheridan states unequivocally, "Scripture is nothing other than the perennial incarnation of the Logos,"[4] and Rolf Gögler argues, "Die Hl. Schrift ist eine blebende Inkarnation des Logos."[5] Is this a *true* incarnation, or not?

We saw in the Introduction that Gögler, for his part, seeks to argue that this is more than a mere metaphor by drawing on Origen's Stoic view of language and etymology, which posits a direct relationship between the name of a thing and its essence.[6] The words of Scripture, while only crude shadows of a divine reality, nevertheless participate in or contain something of that reality. Though the words are not literally "flesh," even for him, Gögler's interpretation grants them more "fleshly" weight in that they directly link the reader to a personal being.

But despite the appeal of this approach, it is ultimately unsatisfactory. First of all, Origen's primary purposes in referencing this Stoic theory is to demonstrate the inherent *power* of names and words. He argues that the magical formulas and incantations of foreign peoples are, by nature, effective, as is the careful pronouncement of the names of God handed down by the Hebrews:

> Now if by a special study we could show the nature of powerful names, some of which are used by the Egyptian wise men, or the learned men among the

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[2] Hans Boersma, "Joshua as Sacrament," 32, n. 29.

[3] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 416.

[4] "Scripture", *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 200.

[5] Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes*, 302.

[6] See pp. 33–34 of the present study, esp. n. 109.

> Persian magi, or the Brahmans, or Samanaeans among the Indian philosophers, and so on according to each nation, and if we could establish that so-called magic [μαγεία] is not, as the followers of Epicurus and Aristotle think, utterly incoherent, but, as the experts in these things prove, is a consistent system, which has principles known to very few; then we would say that the name Sabaoth, and Adonai, and all the other names that have been handed down by the Hebrews with great reverence, are not concerned with ordinary created things, but with a certain mysterious divine science [θεολογία] that is related to the Creator of the universe. It is for this reason that when these names are pronounced in a particular sequence which is natural to them, they can be employed for certain purposes.[7]

The problem, as it relates to Gögler's thesis, is that this entails no initiative on the part of the reader. This is not about the movement from the letter to the spirit, or the recognition of the divinity of Christ in the text, but about the involuntary, mystical effect of words. They are, in a sense, magical. Pronounced rightly, and in the right sequence, they are inherently effective with relation to their intended purpose. Origen will elsewhere claim that the very recitation of Scripture conveys benefit to the hearer, even without understanding: "The reading of the divine discourse glides into our ears although it may seem unintelligible. For the pagans believe that when certain songs called incantations are whispered by those who possess this skill … just from the sound of the voice they can put serpents to sleep or even drag them from deep caves."[8]

Second, as a corollary of the above, Origen is insistent that it is the *sounds* of the words which are effective:

> On the subject of names I have to say further that experts in the use of charms relate that a man who pronounces a given spell in its native language can bring about the effect that the spell is claimed to do. But if the same spell is

[7] *CCels* 1.24. For Origen, this kind of "magic" is precisely what the Egyptian enchanters used in their confrontation with Moses: "Who among men can transform a branch into a serpent by physical strength, which is what it is that they did? Or who can change water into blood by physical strength? Yet the enchanters and magicians of the Egyptians did this" (*HomNum* 13.4.3–4).

[8] *HomJos* 20.1.

> translated into any other language whatever, it can be seen to be weak and ineffective. Thus it is not the significance of the things which the words describe that has a certain power to do this or that, but it is the qualities and characteristics of the sounds [φωναί].[9]

Again, this suggests that there is no effort required on the part of the reader. If this is what Origen has in mind when he speaks of a scriptural incarnation, then hearing alone would be enough to bring about an encounter with Christ. As a result, there would also be no legitimate difference between the advanced scriptural exegete and the catechumen. Even more problematic, the only effective form of reading would be *audible* reading, and if ever the text were translated into another language, it would cease to be the flesh of Christ. However, Origen himself reads the Old Testament predominantly in Greek, and does not seem to consider it a lesser manifestation of the Word.[10]

Finally, it is important to look at the way Origen actually uses this theory of language in his theology. In almost every instance, it is not for the purposes of recognizing Christ in the Scriptures, thereby coming to know him, but for casting out demons and calling upon the aid of angels. He argues that when the name of Jesus is pronounced, it can cause "demons to be driven out of men," and "in fact the name of Jesus is so powerful against the demons that sometimes it is effective even when

[9] *CCels* 1.25.

[10] For a study of the Septuagint Origen would have been using, see Eugene Ulrich, "Origen's Old Testament Text: The Transmission History of the Septuagint to the Third Century, CE," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William Petersen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 3–33. Ulrich notes, "Origen primarily used 'the Septuagint,' and what later theologians, such as Eusebius, Jerome, or Pamphilus would think of as 'the Septuagint text' looked noticeably different from 'the Septuagint text' which Origen first took in hand ... because he devoted a substantial amount of time to re-editing that 'Septuagint text.'" "Origen's Old Testament Text," 5. On Origen's preference for the Septuagint in general, see R. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, 65–76.

pronounced by bad men."[11] Elsewhere he states, "When the faithless hostile powers hear these or those names in songs or incantations, they are present, provide service, and devote attention to that for which they feel they have been invoked by this or that name."[12] This is true also of "the heavenly powers and angels of God who are with us … if we always utter from our mouth as certain songs and incantations the words of Scripture and the pronouncements of these names."[13] In short, Origen's Stoic view of language has little, if anything to do with the scriptural enfleshment of Christ. One is directed *away* from the text, toward angels, demons, and the soothing of the soul. The other is directed *toward* the text itself, and the perception and recognition of its identity as the divine Word of God. As insightful as Gögler's analysis is, Origen is not talking about his philosophy of language here.

A better starting place is found in Origen's teaching on the "garments of the Word" (τὰ ἱμάτια τοῦ λόγου), a phrase he deliberately equates with the scriptural flesh of Christ. If we return to the opening words of the *Homilies on Leviticus*, for example, Origen states, "when the Word of God was brought to humans through the prophets and the lawgiver, it was not brought without proper *garments* (*indumenta*). For just as [through Mary, the Word] was covered with the veil of the flesh, so here with the veil of the letter, so that the letter may be seen as flesh, but the spiritual sense hiding within may be perceived as divine."[14] As he goes on, he adds, "But perhaps the worthy and the unworthy may either see or hear … according to the

[11] *CCels* 1.6.

[12] *HomJos* 20.1.

[13] Ibid.

[14] *HomLev* 1.1; trans. mine.

letter, which as the flesh of the Word of God is also the garment of its divinity."[15] These "garments" are therefore synonymous with his scriptural flesh. Or rather, the flesh acts *as* a garment, making him visible to the reader. In one of his many treatments of the Transfiguration, Origen describes these garments in greater detail:

> And down below the Word has other garments; they are not white, they are not like the light; if you will ascend to the lofty mountain, you will see his light and his garments. *The garments of the Word are the phrases of the Scripture*; the divine thoughts are clothed in these expressions. As then down below he looks different, but having ascended he is transfigured. His face beaming like the sun, so it is with his clothing, so it is with his garments. When you are below, they do not shine, they are not white; but if you ascend, you will see the beauty and the light of the garments, and will marvel at the transfigured face of Jesus.[16]

"The garments of the Word are the phrases of the Scripture" (τὰ ἱμάτια τοῦ λόγου αἱ λέξεις εἰσὶ τῆς γραφῆς). In another interpretation, Origen will describe these garments as the "expressions and letters of the Gospels with which he invested himself."[17] The Word clothes himself in them as a form of accommodation, making himself manifest to the reader. But which of Scripture's "expressions and letters" is Origen referring to? And how do they make the Word manifest?

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[15] Ibid., trans. mine.

[16] *Philoc* 15.19, emphasis mine. This same theme is picked up by a number of later thinkers, including Maximus the Confessor. However, while Origen speaks of the "face," "garments," and "flesh" of Christ as equivalent terms, in that they both conceal and reveal the Word simultaneously, Maximus will maintain a distinction between the "flesh" (or "face") and the "garments" in the Transfiguration: "So the words of holy Scripture are said to be garments, and the concepts understood to be flesh of the Word, in one case we reveal, in the other we conceal" See *Difficulty* 10.18:1129B, trans. Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 110. Louth writes, "While the face of Christ draws us into apophatic theology, the body and the garments of Christ speak of kataphatic theology." A. Louth, "From Doctrine of Christ to Icon of Christ: St. Maximus the Confessor on the Transfiguration of Christ," in *In the Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays on Jesus Christ in the Early Church in Honor of Brian E. Daley, S.J.* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 267.

[17] *ComMt* 12.38. He adds, "But I think that even the words in the apostles which indicate the truths concerning him are garments of Jesus, which become white to those who go up into the high mountain along with Jesus" (ibid.).

In this chapter, I will argue that the scriptural flesh of Christ, or the "garments of the Word," should be understood specifically with relation to the *epinoiai* (ἐπίνοιαι). The *epinoiai* in Origen's work consist primarily of the various biblical titles that the Word assumes for the sake of humanity, like Stone, Bread of Life, Good Shepherd, King, Light of the World, and so on.[18] Indeed, as we shall see, Origen constructs an overt link between these titles and the material flesh of Christ in the pages of *Contra Celsus*, where both are described as acts of visible accommodation. Like the body of Jesus, the *epinoiai* reveal Christ to each individual, but seeing his divinity through the *epinoiai* entails the lengthy and strenuous climb up Mount Tabor. The effect is not automatic. Following this, I will argue that despite the figural nature of Origen's language, this scriptural flesh is no less "real" than Christ's material flesh, because Origen does not perceive that which is figural to be lesser. In fact, the flesh Christ assumes in the Scriptures appears to be *more* "real" by virtue of its lasting noetic quality.

To begin, let us look to Contra Celsus and Origen's treatment of divine accommodation through the bodily appearance of Jesus, before turning to the way in which he relates that bodily appearance to the *epinoiai*.

The Changing Forms of Jesus

As one of the central mysteries of the Christian faith, Origen habitually stresses the fact that the Word has become flesh, and not just any flesh, but *human* flesh. He has "taken on the flesh of our nature," differing only in the manner of

[18] Mt 21:42; Jn 6:35, 10:11, 18:37, 8:12.

conception.[19] Whereas our bodies were conceived naturally, his was conceived by a virgin, through the Holy Spirit. For Origen, however, this difference does not alter the fact that his flesh was real, in every sense of the word. One need not look far into *On First Principles* to find evidence of this point. In the well-known preface to that text, he describes the Son of God thus: "In these last times he emptied himself and was made man, was made flesh although he was God; and being made man, he still remained what he was, namely, God. He took to himself a body like our body differing in this alone, that it was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit."[20] He goes to extra lengths to stress the reality of that body, adding: "And this Jesus Christ was born and suffered in truth and not merely in appearance [*in veritate, et non per phantasiam*], and truly died our common death. Moreover he truly rose from the dead, and after the resurrection companied with his disciples and was then taken up into heaven."[21] As we saw in the previous chapter, Origen openly marvels at the fact that "the very Word of the Father" entered into a woman's womb, cried like a child, and walked about as a man of Judea.[22] But despite these declarations, Origen has repeatedly been accused of teaching the very Christological views he so emphatically denounces.

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[19] *ComRm* 3.5.6 (3.8.4 in Scheck). He writes, "For although he had taken on the flesh of our nature, it was nevertheless conceived by an undefiled virgin and formed by the chaste operation of the Holy Spirit."

[20] *PArch* 1. Pref. 4.

[21] Ibid.

[22] *PArch* 2.6.2. "But of all the marvelous and splendid things about him there is one that utterly transcends the limits of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence to think of or understand, namely, how this mighty power of the divine majesty, the very word of the Father, and the very wisdom of God, in which were created 'all things visible and invisible,' can be believed to have existed within the compass of that man who appeared in Judea; yes, and how the wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a little child and uttered noises like those of crying children."

In his later years, he composed what is perhaps the most comprehensive apologetic work of the patristic age: *Contra Celsus*.[23] In this lengthy volume, he responds point-by-point to the second-century writer of that name, an Epicurean or Platonist philosopher,[24] who had written the first known systematic critique of the Christian faith. The work is invaluable for its insight into how Origen perceives Christianity in contrast to other religious and philosophical systems, but it also contains some of his most complex theological teachings on the nature and identity of Christ.

In the course of this work, Origen repeatedly writes of the flesh of Jesus as though it is capable of change or alteration. One of the more striking instances is found in his response to Celsus' charge that Jesus could not have been divine because his body was "little and ugly and undistinguished." Origen presumes that the root of Celsus' criticism lies in the famous opening lines of Isaiah 53: "He has neither form nor glory, and we saw him, and he had neither form nor beauty" (Is 53:2).[25] To this, Origen first responds by affirming that Isaiah does in fact refer to the body of Jesus as ugly, but not as "little" or "undistinguished." However, his next move is to protest that Celsus has only presented one side of the story. Indeed, Celsus has overlooked those places in Scripture that suggest Jesus had a fairer appearance, such as Psalm 44:4 ("Gird your sword upon your thigh O mighty one, with your fairness and your

[23] Eusebius claims that Origen wrote eight treatises in reply to Celsus when he was over sixty years old, during the reign of Philip the Arabian (r. A.D. 244–249). See *EH* 6.36.2.

[24] Eusebius calls him an Epicurean, and says he composed a work entitled *True Doctrine* (*EH* 6.36). However, Henry Chadwick argues that "it is perfectly clear from almost every page of the *Contra Celsum* that Celsus is far from being in any sense an Epicurean. His philosophy is that of Middle Platonism, and with Epicureanism he betrays no affinities at all." See Chadwick's introduction in *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), xxv.

[25] The Masoretic Text reads, "He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him."

beauty.").[26] Furthermore, he entirely neglects the account of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, where Jesus reveals his glory to Peter, James, and John.

Of course, this argument leaves Origen the task of reconciling the fact that Scripture describes Christ in two contradictory ways. For him, neither Isaiah nor the Psalms can be false, or mistaken, yet they seem to counter one another directly. But rather than dismissing one of the two, he chooses to conflate them:

> How did [Celsus] fail to notice that [Jesus'] body differed in accordance with the capacity of those who saw it, and on this account appeared in such form as was beneficial for the needs of each individual's vision? It is not remarkable that matter, which is by nature subject to change, alteration, and transformation into anything which the Creator desires, and is capable of possessing any quality which the Artificer wishes, at one time possesses a quality of which it is said "He had not form or beauty," and at another time a quality so glorious and striking and wonderful that the three apostles who went up with Jesus and saw the exquisite beauty fell on their faces.[27]

By Origen's account, Jesus was capable of altering his physical appearance at will, with each individual perceiving him in a unique and specific way. As if anticipating the criticism he might draw, Origen points out that matter is by nature changing and capable of transformation, especially in the hands of its Creator. Sometimes, Jesus' appearance will be unsightly, as Isaiah prophesied. At other times, he will appear beautiful, as he is described in the Psalms. Ultimately, these changing forms are a marker of divinity, rather than any one form, and so Celsus' argument fails on multiple counts.

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[26] Ps 45:3 in the Masoretic Text, which reads, "Gird your sword upon your thigh, O Mighty One, in your glory and majesty!" The difference is important in this case, as the LXX Origen quotes implies physical attractiveness (τῇ ὡραιότητί σου καὶ τῷ κάλλει σου), key to his argument.

[27] *CCels* 6.77. πῶς οὐκ ἐώρα τὸ παραλλάττον τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸ τοῖς ὁρῶσι δυνατὸν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο χρήσιμον τοιοῦτο φαινόμενον, ὁποῖον ἔδει ἑκάστῳ βλέπεσθαι; Καὶ οὐ θαυμαστὸν τὴν φύσει τρεπτὴν καὶ ἀλλοιωτὴν καὶ εἰς πάντα ἃ βούλεται ὁ δημιουργὸς ὕλην μεταβλητὴν καὶ πάσης ποιότητος, ἣν ὁ τεκνίτης βούλεται, δεκτικήν, ὁτὲ μὲν ἔχειν ποιότητα, καθ' ἣν λέγεται τό· « Οὐκ εἶχεν εἶδος οὐδὲ κάλλος», ὁτὲ δὲ οὕτως ἔνδοξον καὶ καταπληκτικὴν καὶ θαυμαστήν, ὡς « ἐπὶ πρόσωπον » πεσεῖν τοὺς θεατὰς τοῦ τηλικούτου κάλλους συνανελθόντας τῷ Ἰησοῦ τρεῖς ἀποστόλους.

Not surprisingly, many theologians in the past have found this tremendously unnerving, because it implies that Jesus' flesh was different than our own. Indeed, it sounds as though Origen is suggesting that Jesus' physical flesh underwent physical mutation. This tends to lead to accusations of gnostic influence, or of "docetism." Henry Chadwick, for example, notes that in his *Series of Commentaries on Matthew*, Origen attributes this teaching to a "tradition" which had come down to him.[28] Chadwick suggests that this tradition is a gnostic one. He cites the *Acts of John* as evidence, where John says, "Sometimes when I would lay hold on him, I met with a material and solid body, and at other times, again, when I felt him, the substance was immaterial and as if it existed not at all."[29] Though Origen's comment is markedly different, Chadwick spots the underlying instability of the flesh of Christ in both texts, and therefore proposes that the *Acts of John* were at least in some capacity influential for Origen.[30]

Others have straightforwardly accused Origen of docetism, despite the very clear anti-docetic statements noted earlier. Charles Bigg, for example, suggests that

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[28] *SerMt* 100. "A tradition about Jesus has come down to us to the effect that there were not only two forms in him, one according to which everybody saw him, and another according to which he was transfigured before his disciples on the mount when also his face shone like the sun; but that he even appeared to each individual in the form of which he was worthy." Trans. Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, 390, n.1.

[29] *Acts of John* 93. ποτὲ βουλόμενος αὐτὸν κρατῆσαι ἐν ὑλώδει καὶ παχεῖ σώματι προσέβαλλον· ἄλλοτε δέ ποτε πάλιν ψηλαφῶντός μου αὐτὸν ἄυλον ἦν καὶ ἀσώματον τὸ ὑποκείμενον καὶ ὡς μηδὲ ὅλως ὄν. Maximilianus Bonnet, ed., *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 2 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1972), 196. The *Acts of John*, likely written in the latter half of the second century or the early third century in either Syria or Egypt, is a collection of apocryphal narratives that recounts the journeys, deeds, and death of the apostle John. This collection was commonly read by the Manicheans and the Priscillianists, but was eventually condemned in the eighth century at Nicaea II.

[30] John McGuckin points to the *Acts of Peter* 20 as another comparable text, wherein we read, "For each one of us saw him as his capacity permitted." Indeed, the text goes on to refer to Jesus as "this great and small one, beautiful and ugly, young and old," and so on. John McGuckin, "The Changing Forms of Jesus," in Origeniana Quarta, ed. Lothar Lies, Innsbrucker Theologische Studien 19 (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 216.

in Origen's words "we may perhaps recognize the last faint trace of Docetism,"[31] and William Fairweather writes that while "the Alexandrian theologians rejected Docetism in its grosser forms, there is nevertheless a certain docetic tinge about their views regarding the Lord's body."[32] Fairweather specifically cites Origen's claim that Jesus was able to alter his appearance, writing, "It is thus evident that Origen's view of matter as a changing substance qualifies to some extent his admission of the reality of Christ's body. On this account it has even been said that 'the Incarnation, as he represents it, is more nearly allied to the religion of India than to that of the apostles.'"[33] In other words, "Incarnation" must be understood in a much looser sense than most Christians would care to allow. Yes, he takes on flesh, but what kind of flesh? Origen's Jesus sounds more like a phantom than a man.[34]

However, to see docetism in this is to read Origen carelessly. Despite occasional contradictions in his work, even Origen would not categorically deny that Jesus' flesh was anything less than real, and then go on to maintain just the opposite. Within the very pages of *Contra Celsus*, he insists that he is "persuaded that the advent of Jesus to men was not a mere appearance, but a reality and an indisputable fact."[35] This is not about the reality of Jesus' flesh at all, but about the noetic perception of that flesh.

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[31] Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 191.

[32] William Fairweather, *Origen and Greek Patristic Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901), 182.

[33] Ibid., 183.

[34] R.P.C. Hanson suggests that this is an indication of "Origen's readiness to dissolve historical event into allegory." He goes on to posit, rather bizarrely, that for Origen, the "Jesus of history could during his life on earth occasionally dissolve into the Jesus of religious experience, leaving apparently no historical sediment behind." Hanson, *Allegory & Event*, 272, 275.

[35] *CCels* 4.19.

The point is made abundantly clear in his treatment of the Transfiguration in the *Commentary on Matthew*, a text written about the same time as *Contra Celsus*.[36] There, Origen again claims that Christ appeared in different forms to different individuals. However, on this occasion he notes that the different forms must be understood "in a spiritual way," and that Matthew does not simply write, "He was transfigured," but more specifically that he was transfigured "before them," meaning Peter, James, and John. For Origen, no word or phrase in Scripture is arbitrary or gratuitous, including phrases as seemingly insignificant as this.[37] He begins to speculate: "And according to this, you ask whether it is possible for Jesus to be transfigured before some with this kind of transfiguration, *and at the same time* not to be transfigured before others."[38] Answered positively, the implications of the question are obvious. Even Jesus' Transfiguration was not a primarily physical phenomenon, but a noetic one, perceivable only by his disciples.[39]

He ultimately does not answer this question, instead changing the path of the discussion and showing his readers how they may themselves behold the transfigured Jesus in the words of the Gospels. We are therefore left to wonder. But there are

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[36] Eusebius explicitly states that Origen wrote this in the same time period as *Contra Celsus*. He also informs us that there were twenty-five books in the *Commentary*, though only eight survive intact. Additional portions survive in Latin (*EH* 6.36).

[37] For Origen, "it is fitting that one believes the sacred Scriptures have not even one dot which is empty of the Wisdom of God … and there is nothing either in the Prophets, or in the Law, or in the Gospels, or in the Apostles, which does not come down from the fullness of the divine Majesty" (*HomJer* 23.2.3).

[38] *ComMt* 12.37; trans. and emphasis mine.

[39] See *HomEz* 2.3.4: "For there are eyes within us that are better than those that we have in the body. These [inner] eyes either see Jesus the Lord, who created them for seeing him, or, on the other hand, they are completely blind. If I am a sinner, I see nothing, nor can I view the light of the truth." In the *Dialogue with Heraclides*, too, Origen writes, "The eyes of the inner human being see more perceptively than we do. 'Open my eyes and I will understand the wondrous things of your law.' Is this to say that his eyes are veiled? No, but our eyes are our mind" (*DialHer* 16.32–17.2).

several good reasons to believe that he is presenting his own position. First, he brings it up needlessly, when he could have said nothing at all. Second, he does so after insisting that his readers understand the Transfiguration "in a spiritual way." And third, he carefully draws attention to Matthew's word choice ("before them"), calling it a "necessary addition." Origen is almost certainly the culprit behind this speculative query. Perhaps the complexity of the question prevents him from saying more, or perhaps he does not wish to offend, but his meaning is nonetheless clear.[40]

In the previous chapter, we also briefly encountered a relevant passage from the *Homilies on Luke*, where Origen is discussing the account of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, which reads, "The angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense" (Lk 1:11). The ability of the angel to appear at will strikes Origen as noteworthy, and leads him to address the subject of "sight" as it relates to both corporeal and non-corporeal beings. On the one hand, corporeal beings need not do anything in order to be seen. "The observer's eye is simply directed toward them."[41] On the other hand, celestial creatures like angels must choose to be seen. "It lies within their will to be seen or not."[42] In the course of this discussion, he turns also to the subject of Jesus' body, applying this very same principle:

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[40] As a point of contrast with what Origen is actually doing, we might look at the caricature of "docetism" presented by Irenaeus in his depiction Basilides. Irenaeus writes, "Wherefore he [Jesus] did not himself suffer death, but Simon, a certain man of Cyrene, being compelled, bore the cross in his stead; so that this latter being transfigured by him, that he might be thought to be Jesus, was crucified, through ignorance and error, while Jesus himself received the form of Simon, and, standing by, laughed at them. For since he was an incorporeal power, and the *Nous* (mind) of the unborn father, he transfigured himself as he pleased, and thus ascended to him who had sent him, deriding them, inasmuch as he could not be laid hold of, and was invisible to all." See *Against Heresies*, 1.24.4 (ANF 1:349).

[41] *HomLc* 3.1.

[42] Ibid.

> I think we should understand something similar of Christ, too, when he was seen in the body. Not everyone who laid eyes on him was able to see him. They saw his body, but insofar as he was Christ, they could not see him. But his disciples saw him and beheld the greatness of his divinity ... Neither Pilate nor Judas saw Christ as Christ. Nor did the crowd, which pressed around him. Only those whom Jesus judged worthy of beholding him really saw him.[43]

This passage suggests that the simultaneous diversity of perspectives Origen writes about was not limited to the Transfiguration, but extended to all people, at any time. Whereas certain individuals, such as some of Jesus' disciples, were capable of looking at his body and seeing his divinity, others like Pilate or Judas saw only a man with a body as plain as any other. The way in which one perceives Jesus' appearance is thus a result of two factors: his decision to reveal himself at will, and one's own spiritual disposition and noetic capacity to see him.

As a final point on this, it is important to note that Origen does not believe there to be only two ways in which to see Christ. In his treatment of the Transfiguration above, Origen speaks as though one would either see the transfigured Christ, or not. But in the rest of his work, Origen lays out a graduated path, where Jesus "appears to each of those who are led to know him in a form corresponding to the state of the individual, whether he is a beginner, or has made a little progress, or is considerably advanced, or has nearly attained to virtue already, or has in fact attained it."[44] In other words, Jesus' flesh does not only appear as *either* transfigured *or* not transfigured, fleshly *or* divine.[45] Rather, Origen understands there to be an

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[43] Ibid., 3.3–4. In the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, too, Origen remarks, "Though there were many who saw him, none of them is said to have seen him, save he who recognized that he was the Word and Son of God, in whom at the same time the Father is said to be recognized and seen" (*ComCt* 3.13).

[44] *CCels* 4.16.

[45] It is precisely for this reason that Origen writes, "It is not true, as Celsus and those like him would say, that our God was transformed when he went up a high mountain and showed his *other*

entire spectrum of individual perception, citing at least five different stages in this passage alone.[46] As we shall see, every element of this teaching, from individual capacity, to noetic sight, to hierarchical upward movement, will also be reflected in his discussion of Scripture and the *epinoiai*.

The *Epinoiai*

Origen uses the term *epinoiai* merely to denote the numerous names and titles by which the Son is called in Scripture. Though simple in definition, this doctrine is one of Origen's most sophisticated and complex.[47] Fortunately, he speaks of it with such detail, on so many occasions, that we can paint a fairly complete picture. The two essential works are *On First Principles* and Book One of the *Commentary on John*, both of which were written in Alexandria relatively early in Origen's theological career. In each of these texts, he systematically goes through a sequence of titles for the purpose of better understanding the nature and activity of the Son.

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form, which was far superior to that which was seen by the people down below, who were unable to follow him to the high place" (*CCels* 4.16; emphasis mine).

[46] John Behr points out that the one form of Jesus that does *not* change is the form he assumes on the cross. Or, to put it another way, the Passion represents his fixed form. Origen writes, "But how can Celsus, and the enemies of the Divine Word … know the meaning of the different appearances of Jesus? I refer to the different periods of his life, to anything he did before the Passion, and whatever happened after his resurrection from the dead" (*Philoc* 15.19). See J. Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 181. In some ways, this conflicts with what we saw in the previous chapter, where after his resurrection, Jesus had to hide himself from certain individuals who did not possess the capacity to look upon his divinity (as though his divine form was "fixed" after his resurrection). But it is notable that Origen does not actually list the post-resurrection appearances as evidence of Jesus' changing forms in *Contra Celsus*. It may be that Origen himself is conflicted on the issue.

[47] On the subject of Origen and the *epinoiai*, see Jean Daniélou, *Origène* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), 255–58; Marguerite Harl, *Origène et la fonction révélatrice du Verbe incarné* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1958), 254–55; Hanson, *Allegory & Event*, 272–76; H. Crouzel, *Origène*, 246–50; J. Wolinski, "Les recours aux ἐπινοία δu Christ dans le *Commentaire sur Jean* d'Origène," in *Origeniana Sexta: Origène et La Bible*, eds. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 465–92; Ronald Heine, "Epinoiai," *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 93–95.

Contra Celsus, on the other hand, is not itself a major source of information, but it is there that Origen explicitly links the *epinoiai* to the body of Christ. It seems Celsus had argued that if Jesus had wanted to prove his divinity, he ought to have appeared bodily after his resurrection to those who had mocked and crucified him only days before.[48] In his lengthy reply, Origen first points out that Jesus did appear to many people after his resurrection, and more specifically, that Jesus appeared in a unique, resurrected form. But before addressing the question of Jesus' enemies (who did not possess the capacity to see him in that form), he stops to explain how it is that Jesus was able to appear in different forms at all:

> Although Jesus was one, he had several aspects [ἐπίνοιαι]; and to those who saw him he did not appear alike to all. That he had many aspects is clear from the saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and "I am the bread," and "I am the door," and countless other such sayings. Moreover, that his appearance was not just the same to those who saw him, but varied according to their individual capacity, will be clear to people who carefully consider why, when about to be transfigured on the high mountain, he did not take all the apostles, but only Peter, James, and John. For they alone had the capacity to see his glory at that time, and were able also to perceive Moses and Elijah when they appeared in glory, and to hear them conversing together, and the voice from heaven out of the cloud.[49]

The reference to the *epinoiai* looks curiously out of place, but Origen seems to find the connection perfectly natural. Put simply, he sees the *epinoiai* as the scriptural *equivalent* of Christ's bodily flesh. They both represent his "changing forms," making him manifest to specific individuals in specific ways. To discover why,

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[48] *CCels* 2.63.

[49] Ibid., 2.64. Ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἷς ὢν πλείονα τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ ἦν, καὶ τοῖς βλέπουσιν οὐχ ὁμοίως πᾶσιν ὁρώμενος. Καὶ ὅτι μὲν τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ πλείονα ἦν, καὶ σαφὲς ἐκ τοῦ « Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήτεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ » καὶ τοῦ « Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος » καὶ τοῦ « Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ θύρα » καὶ ἄλλων μυρίων. Ὅτι δὲ καὶ βλεπόμενος οὐχ ὡσαύτως τοῖς βλέπουσιν ἐφαίνετο, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐχώρουν οἱ βλέποντες, σαφὲς ἔσται τοῖς ἐφιστᾶσι, διὰ τί μέλλων μεταμορφοῦσθαι ἐν τῷ ὑψηλῷ ὄρει οὐδὲ τοὺς ἀποστόλους πάντας παρείληφεν ἀλλὰ μόνους τὸν Πέτρον καὶ τὸν Ἰάκωβον καὶ τὸν Ἰωάννην, ὡς μόνους χωροῦντας τὴν τότε δόξαν αὐτοῦ θεωρῆσαι, δυναμένους δὲ καὶ τοὺς ὀφθέντας ἐν δόξῃ Μωυσέα καὶ Ἠλίαν κατανοῆσαι καὶ ἀκοῦσαι συλλαλούντων αὐτῶν καὶ τῆς ἀπὸ τῆς νεφέλης οὐρανόθεν φωνῆς.

however, we must gain a better understanding of the *epinoiai* themselves. Starting chronologically with *On First Principles*, and then moving to the *Commentary on John*,[50] we will come to see not only what Origen means when he speaks of the *epinoiai*, but also where they are derived from, what their significance is, and how his own thought on the subject develops over time.

On First Principles

Again, *On First Principles* is unique within Origen's written corpus in that it a kind of systematic treatment of Christian theology, covering not only "small and trivial questions," but also "some that are great and important; on the nature, for instance, of God or of the Lord Jesus Christ or of the Holy Spirit, and in addition on the natures of those created beings, the dominions and the holy powers."[51] In his exposition of "the Lord Jesus Christ," he states that his "first task" is to "see what the only-begotten Son of God is, seeing he is called by many different *names*

[50] On the chronological ordering of these texts, I follow the reasoning of Pierre Nautin, who dates *On First Principles* to a period slightly before the composition of the *Commentary on John*. As a starting point, Origen himself makes it clear in Book One of the *Commentary* that he is writing after having just returned to Alexandria from a period of absence. He writes, to Ambrose, "What other firstfruits of our activities ought there to have been, then, since we have come home to Alexandria, than that devoted to the firstfruits of the Scriptures?" (1.13). In other words, the *Commentary* is the first of Origen's written projects since his return. Of course, the problem is determining where, why, and when he had gone. Nautin equates this absence from Alexandria with an absence recorded by Eusebius, who reports that Origen departed to Palestine because "no small warfare broke out again in the city" (*EH* 6.19). Yet, rather than understanding this "warfare" as the massacre of Caracalla in 215, as many have done, Nautin takes it to be a reference to the heated conflict between Origen and his bishop, Demetrius. In Nautin's estimation, the conflict was centered on the way in which Origen had allegorized the creation account in his *Commentary on Genesis*, as well as the subsequent defense of his theology and methodology found in *On First Principles*. That being said, Nautin posits that Origen left Alexandria as a result of this conflict and traveled to Palestine, only returning after having been recalled by Demetrius and an embassy of deacons (*EH* 6.19). Upon his arrival, he began his work on the *Commentary on John*. Nautin dates *On First Principles* to 229, and Books 1–4 of the *Commentary on John* to 231, though, for the purposes of this chapter, the dates are less significant than the order in which they were written. See Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son oeuvre*, 368–71.

[51] *PArch* 1. Pref. 2.

(*nomina*)."[52] Though only the Latin of Rufinus is available, Origen is undoubtedly referring to the *epinoiai*. The two terms (ἐπίνοια and ὄνομα, or *nomen* in Latin) are synonymous in this case,[53] precisely because the *epinoiai* are derived from Christ's many names. These names form the backbone of the entire discussion. In this text, Origen addresses Wisdom, Truth, Life, Resurrection, Way, Brightness, Unspotted Mirror, True Light, and many others found in the pages of both the Old and New Testaments. We need not look at each of these in turn. Rather, to come away with a more general impression of how Origen perceives the *epioniai* at this early stage, I will briefly identify three of the most important ideas in this text.

First, regarding their source, Origen notes that the Son is called by these many different titles "according to the circumstances and beliefs of the different writers."[54] That is, the various authors of Scripture have applied these unique appellations to the Son as a result of their own situations, needs, interests, and convictions. But as Origen goes on, it becomes apparent that the scriptural writers do not *bestow* these titles upon the Son, as though he lacked them. While the *epinoiai* are articulated by the authors and made known through the Scriptures, the Scriptures are not their ultimate or foundational source. Rather, Origen reveals that they are derived from the Son's "works and powers," as well as from his "loving disposition."[55] An example of the former would be something like "Resurrection,"

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[52] Ibid., 1.2.1.

[53] Origen makes this especially clear in his treatment of the *epinoiai* in the *Commentary on John*, where he begins by writing, "And if we should carefully consider all the *concepts* [ἐπινοίαι] applied to him…", and then concludes with "Once, therefore, we have collected the *titles* [ὀνόματα] of the Son..." (1.118, 123).

[54] *PArch* 1.2.1.

[55] Ibid., 1.2.4; 1.2.13.

because as Resurrection the Son has the power to conquer death.[56] An example of the latter would be "Image of [the Father's] Goodness."[57] His loving disposition is made manifest in this goodness, with its source in the Father. These titles therefore describe realities (rather than mere designations), and Scripture is the means by which those realties are revealed.

Second, as a corollary of the above, Origen notes that these *epinoiai* are not physical qualities or processes. They do not "denote either size or shape or color."[58] For designations like Truth, this may be an obvious point. However, later on in his exposition Origen will explain the meaning of titles more closely associated with matter, such as Brightness[59] or Unspotted Mirror.[60] This qualification becomes vital in those instances, as Origen does not wish his readers to make the naïve assumption that the Son is, for instance, a literal mirror.[61] Even these titles are derived from the Son's powers and goodness.

Last, and perhaps most important, is the way Origen actually utilizes the *epinoiai* in this text. Though he does not explicitly say what role they are meant to play as a whole, we can infer a great deal by looking at the titles and theological themes he chooses to emphasize. In doing so, a pattern emerges. In this text, Origen

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[56] Ibid., 1.2.4.

[57] Ibid., 1.2.13.

[58] Ibid., 1.2.4.

[59] Ibid., 1.2.7.

[60] Ibid., 1.2.12.

[61] Indeed, he makes this point more explicit further on, writing, "For the Son is the Word, and therefore we must understand that nothing in him is perceptible to the senses. He is Wisdom, and in Wisdom we must not suspect the presence of anything corporeal. 'He is the True Light, which lights every man that comes into the world,' but he has nothing in common with the light of our sun" (ibid., 1.2.6).

appears to use the *epinoiai* in order to say something of the relationship between the Father and the Son. For example, the Son is called the Way specifically because the Way "leads to the Father those who walk along it."[62] He is called Brightness specifically because he reveals the Father, who is called "Light" (Jn 1:5).[63] He is called an Unspotted Mirror in order to show "that there is absolutely no dissimilarity between the Father and the Son."[64] The examples go on, but the theme generally remains consistent. In Origen's own words, "[The Son] reveals the Father by being himself understood; for whoever has understood him understands as a consequence the Father also, according to his own saying, 'He that has seen me, has seen the Father also.'"[65] This line represents the heart of Origen's early work on the subject. The *epinoiai* in this text are ultimately a means of understanding the Father through the Son.

In *On First Principles*, then, the term *epinoiai* refers to the various scriptural titles of the Son, derived from his powers and loving disposition, immaterial, and meant to reveal something of his relationship with the Father. As he concludes, Origen feels he must justify the limited depth of his exposition in *On First Principles*, writing, "And it would be a long business, demanding another time and another work, to collect all the titles of the Son of God, such for example as the True Light, or the Door, or Righteousness, or Sanctification, or Redemption, and countless others, and to explain for what reasons either in regard to his powers or his [loving

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[62] Ibid., 1.2.4.

[63] "It is through its brightness that the nature of the light itself is known and experienced" (ibid., 1.2.7).

[64] Ibid., 1.2.12.

[65] Ibid. 1.2.6.

disposition – *affectus*] each of these names is given to him."[66] It would prove to be a very long business indeed, as his work in the *Commentary on John* demonstrates.

Commentary on John

Origen's discussion of the *epinoiai* in the *Commentary on John* is decidedly different from that in *On First Principles*. A number of factors contribute to the change, including both genre and purpose. While *On First Principle* is more systematic in nature, treating one subject at a time, the *Commentary on John* is precisely that: a commentary. Though Origen does treat specific subjects at length, the structure and content are more or less set by the order of the Gospel of John. His discussion of the *epinoiai* does not take place within a broad exposition on the Son of God, but rather in the midst of explaining the term "beginning" in the opening line of the Johannine Prologue: "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn 1:1). As it turns out, "beginning" is itself one of the *epinoia*. Furthermore, unlike *On First Principles*, Origen has a specific opponent in mind throughout the *Commentary*: Heracleon. While very little is known about this second-century writer, he seems somehow to be associated with the "gnostic" figure Valentinus, and likely came out of the so-called "Italian school" of Valentinianism along with the more famous Ptolemy.[67] Heracleon appears to have written the first ever commentary on the Gospel of John, which Origen quotes nearly fifty times throughout his own work. This slightly reactive bent in the *Commentary on John* therefore adds an anti-gnostic flavor to Origen's

[66] Ibid., 1.2.13. Butterworth has "moral qualities." Origen's statement here is further evidence that *On First Principles* predates the *Commentary on John*, as Origen addresses many of these titles in the latter work.

[67] Origen himself associates Heracleon with Valentinus in *ComJn* 2.100. For more on Heracleon and the exegetical differences between he and Origen, see Jean-Michel Poffet, *La méthode exégétique d'Héracléon et d'Origène* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1985).

treatment of the *epinoiai*. The numerous key terms found in the Johannine prologue, such as *Logos*, are not "aeons" which emanate from the Father, but are rather *epinoiai* or "aspects" of the Son. These qualifications provide important context for what follows.

Again, Origen begins his treatment of the *epinoiai* when he encounters the opening line of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word." For Origen, this statement is anything but self-explanatory. He stresses that the meaning of the term "beginning" cannot be taken for granted. It might have any number of senses.[68] Indeed, "beginning" can refer to "a way and length which is revealed by the Scriptures," as in, "The beginning of a good way is to do justice" (Prv 16:7).[69] Alternatively, "beginning" might be employed in relation to creation, as in the opening of Genesis: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" (Gn 1:1).[70] "Beginning" might also describe the relation of the Father to the Son, or the Creator to creation, in that one has its beginning in the other.[71] Origen goes on to list other possible meanings, but feels confident that the key to understanding this term is actually to be found in Proverbs 8:22, wherein Wisdom says, "God created me the beginning of his ways for his works." "Beginning," then, is meant to designate "Wisdom," one of the chief and most foundational *epinoiai*.[72] Indeed, it is more

[68] *ComJn* 1.90.

[69] Ibid., 1.91.

[70] Ibid., 1.95.

[71] Ibid., 1.102.

[72] Ibid., 1.111. For Origen, the foundational identity of the one he is contemplating is not actually "Word," but "Son." As demonstrated above, "Word" itself is among the *epinoiai*, and he chastises those who place too much emphasis on this particular title, "as though they think the Son of God is an expression of the Father occurring in syllables … For it is impossible for anyone to understand a proclaimed word to be a Son" (*ComJn* 1.152).

foundational even than "Word," as John indicates that the "Word" was *in* the "Beginning," rather than the other way around.[73]

As he concludes that initial discussion, Origen is naturally led on to consider the other titles of the Son. In doing so, his very first remark poses a striking contrast to *On First Principles*. He writes, "God, therefore, is altogether one and simple [Ὁ θεὸς μὲν οὖν πάντη ἕν ἐστι καὶ ἁπλουν]. Our Savior, however, because of the many things [πολλά], since God 'set' him 'forth as a propitiation' and firstfruits of all creation, becomes many things [πολλά], or perhaps even all these things, as the whole creation which can be made free needs him."[74] Here, Origen places at the forefront of his introduction something he presents as only an ancillary idea in *On First Principles*. The Savior takes on these many titles *because* of "the many things." More specifically, he becomes many or all things *as creation requires*.[75] Without neglecting the relationship between the Father and the Son, Origen has decidedly shifted the emphasis of the discussion onto the needs of creation. He makes this even

[73] While Wisdom takes priority for Origen, it is closely bound up with Word in nature and function. Origen writes, "It is Wisdom which is understood, on the one hand, taken in relation to the structure of the contemplation and thoughts of all things, but it is the Word which is received, taken in relation to the communication of the things which have been contemplated to spiritual beings (*ComJn* 1.111). Breaking this down, Wisdom is that which is *understood*, whereas Word is that which is *received*, particularly by "spiritual beings." Wisdom is related to the *structure* and *contemplation* of all things, where as Word is related to the *communication* of the things contemplated. In short, Wisdom appears to have an inward orientation, whereas Word has an outward and personal orientation. Remarkably, in *On First Principles*, Origen actually writes that Wisdom *is* the Word of God, specifically when Wisdom "opens up to all other beings" the mysteries contained within (*PArch* 1.2.3).

[74] *ComJn* 1.119. On the relationship between this and certain elements of Neoplatonic thought regarding the One and the Many, see Christian Hengstermann, "The Neoplatonism of Origen in the First Two Books of His *Commentary on John*," in *Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer*, eds. Sylwia Kaczmarek and Henryk Pietras (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 76–87.

[75] We do occasionally see this in *On First Principles.* For example, in 1.2.4, Origen writes, "But since it was to happen that some should fall away from life and bring death upon themselves … it was needful that before the existence of death there should exist a power capable of destroying the death that was to come, and that there should exist a resurrection." While Origen therefore holds a similar understanding of the *epinoiai* in *On First Principles*, this passage is more of an exception. Even here, the Son is already Resurrection prior to the arrival of death, rather than in response to it.

more explicit in the statement immediately following: "And for this reason he becomes the Light of Men when men, darkened by evil, need the light which shines in the darkness and is not grasped by darkness. He would not have become the Light of Men if men had not been in darkness."[76]

These introductory remarks give a clear indication that Origen has undergone a major shift in understanding, or at least in emphasis, since the composition of *On First Principles*. Here, the accommodation of the Son to humanity has taken center stage. Origen has turned his theological gaze to mankind. Or, to phrase it better, Origen has widened his theological gaze to further include mankind. He now presents the *epinoiai* as coming about largely for the sake of humanity in a reactive and accommodative manner. He becomes the Light of Men when humanity enters into darkness. He becomes the Firstborn from the Dead when humanity enters into sin and death. He becomes Shepherd when humanity becomes like a senseless beast.[77] This becomes Origen's primary framework, and it continues to guide much of what he writes about the *epinoiai* later in life.[78]

Still, Origen makes an important qualification. While the Son "becomes many things" as creation requires, not all of his titles are a result of this need. Having

[76] *ComJn* 1.120.

[77] Ibid., 1.121–22. See also *HomNum* 24.1.6: "For suppose, for instance, that sin did not exist. If sin did not exist, it would not have been necessary for the Son of God to become a Lamb, nor would there have been need that he be slain when he was in the flesh, but he would have remained what he was in the beginning, 'God the Word.'"

[78] For Origen, this accommodation is also reflected in the numerous robes that the high priest uses for his various ministries. Paul, too, "knew how to change robes and to use one with the people, another in the ministry of the sanctuary." Both the high priest and Paul, however, are ultimately imitating Jesus, the "high priest of high priests," who "taught that the high priest ought to use certain garments when he went out 'to the multitudes' and others when he ministers to the experienced and 'perfect' in the sanctuary' (*HomLev* 4.6.4–5).

touched on a few examples such as Light of Men, Firstborn from among the Dead, and Shepherd, he adds the following:

> Once we have collected the titles of the Son, therefore, we must test which of them came into existence later, and whether they would have become so numerous if the saints had begun and continued in blessedness. For perhaps Wisdom alone would remain, or Word, or Life, and by all means Truth, but surely not also the other titles which he took in addition because of us.[79]

There are thus two categories among the *epinoiai*: those the Son takes on for the sake of creation, and those he simply is. While every title benefits creation, certain titles are eternal and unchanging. That is to say, they do not come about as a result of humanity's deficiency.

Ultimately, the distinction Origen draws between these two types of *epinoiai* serves as a basis for what will actually become an even more impactful point. The titles that the Son has taken on for the benefit of rational beings are not equal to the titles he already possesses. Rather, Origen creates a hierarchy among them. Designations like Wisdom, Word, Life, Truth, and others are superior and more fundamental in that they are not mere correctives. The Son does not reach down in order to become Wisdom, but he must lower himself significantly in order to become Shepherd. Furthermore, this hierarchy is not merely descriptive. Rather, it creates an ascending path meant for each individual (not humanity as a whole). Some people, argues Origen, need to encounter the Son in the form of a Physician, or a Shepherd, or Light. However, they ought not require him in these forms forever. They must move onward and upward.[80] For this reason, he exclaims, "Blessed indeed are all

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[79] *ComJn* 1.123.

[80] Charles Bigg comments on this point: "It is not meant that Christ will ever put off his humanity, or that we shall ever cease to need him, for even at the climax of all things he will still be the Life and the Truth. We shall see the Father face to face, but only because we shall be 'one spirit with the Lord.' In this sense only Origen believed that the work of Redemption and Mediation will

who, although they need the Son of God, have become such that they no longer need him as Physician who heals the sick, or as Shepherd, or Redemption, but as Wisdom, and Word, and Righteousness, or if there is any other title for those who, because of their perfection, can receive his noblest titles."[81] This hierarchy and the ascending path it produces become the central feature of Origen's treatment of the *epinoiai* from this point on. Above all, they are a means of accommodation, allowing Christ to draw individuals upward.[82]

Returning to *Contra Celsus*, then, Origen's decision to couple together the *epinoiai* and Jesus' physical appearance seems perfectly warranted. Just as Jesus' physical appearance varied according to each person's capacity, so also do his many names and titles.[83] The Son reaches down to each individual, through each title, and

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have an end. We shall see the Father no longer in the Son, but as the Son sees him, in the day when God shall be all in all. But to Origen, as to Clement, the belief in Jesus as Redeemer is the note of the lower life. We must rise above the sensible to the intelligible … Redemption is forgiveness and healing discipline, and the true Christian has ceased to need these." *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 211-212.

[81] *ComJn* 1.124. We can thus affirm the words of J. Wolinski, who writes, "Manifestations du 'devenu multiple,' les ἐπίνοιαι sont également le chemin de ce retour à l'unité." J. Wolinski, "Le recours aux ἐπίνοιαι", 490. Though the *epinoiai* are a manifestation of the Son's "multiplicity," they are also the very means by which we ascend back to seeing his unity with the Father. Origen therefore exhorts his audience, "So ascend now, O hearer, if you can, and rise up from earthly thoughts by the contemplation of your mind [*mens*] and by the clear perception of your heart. Forget earthly things for a little while; move beyond the clouds and beyond heaven itself by going there with your mind [*mens*]. Seek there the tabernacle of God where 'Jesus our forerunner entered for us,' and 'is now present before the face of God interceding for us'" (*HomNum* 3.3.2).

[82] Ronald Heine compares Origen's discussion of the ἐπινοία to a person standing in light passing through a prism. "Christ would be analogous to the prism through which the light of God is refracted and the person standing in the light would be the individual Christian. While the prism is more than the different hues of light, nevertheless one cannot see it without seeing the hues. Likewise, the person standing in its presence is necessarily bathed in its colors." "Epinoiai", *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 93–95. In light of all of this, we might employ the definition of an *epinoia* provided by Frederick Bertrand: "A particular relation of the Son of God with a soul." Frederic Bertrand, *Mystique de Jesus chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1951), 21.

[83] At times, Origen will liken this accommodation to medical care: "He does not cure [all people] in the same way, but he heals one, for example, by this or that medicated plaster; to another he gives some medicine; to several he applies what is called cautery; another he soothes with a bitter potion; another by a sweet one … This is how the Word of God addresses the conditions of men"

draws him or her upward until they are capable of knowing him as Wisdom, or Word, or other more divine designations.[84] The accommodation of Christ and the ascension of the individual are therefore the crucial points of connection. Both Jesus' flesh and the *epinoiai* are indications that the Logos "becomes all things to all people" (1 Cor 9:22), to borrow the expression of Paul.[85] Furthermore, this overt connection is a strong indication that in Origen's system, the *epinoiai* do in fact function as the scriptural "flesh" of Christ. Seeing the divinity of Christ in the text entails not only the movement from the literal to the spiritual sense, but also striving to ascend through this hierarchy of names, which are the "garments of the Word." They provide more than just a window into the historical Jesus. The names themselves give him *shape*, creating a living, breathing presence, and each serves to reveal not only the divinity of the Word, but the Father whose image and fullness he reflects.

Anthropomorphisms and Accommodation

Separate, but not unrelated to this is Origen's belief that God utilizes "a kind of childlike or babyish way of speaking"[86] in the Scriptures to communicate truths too difficult for human comprehension. He speaks of this kind of accommodation

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(*HomEz* 3.8.2). Elsewhere, he compares the *epinoiai* to the manna in the wilderness, for "although it was one food, it yielded its flavor to each person after his desire" (*ComCt* 3.8).

[84] The accommodation of the Word and the individual pursuit to perceive him are two distinct processes, but they only occur in a reciprocal relationship that Henri Crouzel has aptly labeled "la rencontre de deux libertés." Crouzel, *Origène*, 141. Thus, Origen will remark, "What has God given to humanity? The knowledge of himself. What does the human being offer God? His faith and love" (*HomNum* 12.3.1).

[85] On the notion that the devil, too, has various "aspects" or *epinoiai*, such as Sin, Dominion, Death, and Desolation, see *ComRm* 5.6.7.

[86] *HomJer* 18.6.4

when explaining how God is said to "repent," to be "angry," or to participate in other distinctively human activities or passions. In Jeremiah 18:8, for example, God declares, "If that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it." Origen remarks:

> Whenever the divine plan involves human matters, it carries the human intellect and manners and way of speaking. And just as we, if we are talking with a two-year-old child, speak inarticulately because of the child—for it is impossible, if we observe what is fitting for the age of a full-grown man, and when talking to children, to understand the children without condescending to their mode of speech—something of this sort also seems to me the case with God whenever he manages the race of men and especially those still infants.[87]

God does not repent or become angry in reality. This language is a form of accommodation, because it describes the *human experience* of God's actions: "And he is truly neither angry nor wrathful, but you experience the effects of anger and wrath when you are in unbearable pains because of evil, whenever he disciplines by what is called the anger of God."[88] From the perspective of a human being, divine discipline feels like anger, and so the biblical writers use the word "anger" in their writings.

This accommodative language becomes even more pertinent when the Scriptures appear to attribute human body parts to God. Celsus makes much of these passages, such as Psalm 18:2 ("His hands established the heaven"), writing, "It is not right for God to be tired or to work with his hands or to give orders."[89] But Origen decries such a literal interpretation, and declares, "We interpret God's hands and limbs allegorically," because "the Bible uses the names of physical lambs in

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., 18.6.7.

[89] *CCels* 6.61.

reference to the powers of God."[90] God does not literally possess hands, but these accommodative anthropomorphisms allow for at least the partial understanding of incomprehensible divine truths.[91]

To defend his position, Origen looks to Scripture itself. Deuteronomy 1:31 states, "As a man, [God] takes on the manners of his son," and similarly, Deuteronomy 8:5 reads, "For the Lord your God has taught you as a man teaches his son." For Origen, God always accommodates himself for the benefit of his children. When, therefore, Celsus "ridicules passages in the Bible which speak of God as though he were subject to human passions," Origen counters:

> Just as when we are talking with little children we do not aim to speak in the finest language possible to us, but say what is appropriate to the weakness of those whom we are addressing, and, further, do what seems to us to be of advantage for the *conversion and correction* of the children as such, so also the Logos of God seems to have arranged the Scriptures, using the method of address which fitted the ability and benefit of the hearers.[92]

This kind of language is ubiquitous throughout Origen's work. As with the flesh of Jesus and the names and titles of Christ, the Logos accommodates himself through anthropomorphisms according to the "ability and benefit of the hearers." Though

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[90] *CCels* 6.62. See also *PArch* 1.16: "God, who is in the beginning of all things, must not be regarded as a composite being, lest perchance we find that the elements, out of which everything that is called composite has been composed, are prior to the first principle himself."

[91] Origen also compares certain forms of divine accommodation to the way a father "pretends" for the benefit of his children. When God declares, "*If* that nation turns back from their evils … I will also repent" (emphasis mine), the "if" is not an indication of ignorance on God's part. Rather, "as one who, so to speak, plays the part of a babe, he pretends not to know the future" (*HomJer* 18.6.5). God pretends, not out of malice, but out of love: "He pretends then that he does not see your future so that he may preserve your self-determination by not foretelling or foreknowing what you will repent or not" (*HomJer* 18.6.7). Closely related is the notion of divine "deceit." When Jeremiah cries out, "You have deceived me, Lord, and I was deceived" (Jer 20:7), this deceit is not to be understood as malicious deceit, but rather corrective deceit: "We frighten children when we speak through words of deceit on account of what is basic to their infancy, in order that through the deceit we may cause them to be afraid and to resort to teachers both to declare and to do what is applicable for the progress of children" (*HomJer* 10.15.4).

[92] *CCels* 4.71; emphasis mine.

Origen predominantly emphasizes the role of the *epinoiai* when referring to scriptural accommodation, every word of Scripture is an act of accommodation, and every word gives Christ flesh.[93] They provide a *means* of coming into contact with him.

Is This Scriptural "Flesh" Real?

It is tempting to assume that when Origen speaks of the "flesh" of the Word, he is speaking either literally, of "real" flesh, or figuratively, of something else. That is, he is speaking either of material flesh, tangible and visible to the naked eye, or of some sort of metaphorical flesh meant only to express theological truth. We have seen many examples of the former. For the latter, however, we might look to the numerous instances in which Origen detects a typological connection between an Old Testament object and the flesh of Jesus. Often, these are objects that conceal, or that are lifted or removed in order to reveal. So, the notion of flesh as a "veil" or a "curtain" is prevalent, and Origen likely draws inspiration from the author of Hebrews: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is through *his flesh* … let us draw near."[94] Origen will follow this model closely. In his *Commentary on Romans*, for example, while explaining what Paul means when he says that God pre-determined Christ as a "propitiation" (ἱλαστήριον) through faith in his blood (Rom 3:25), Origen searches the Scriptures to see if he can

[93] Linking Scripture with the body of Christ once more, Crouzel writes, "Through the anthropomorphisms of the Bible, Origen explains, God has already manifested himself to men after the fashion of a man: we cannot understand Him otherwise, we cannot escape from our human experience … So God has had himself represented as man to be known of men. For the same reason the Christ was made man, thus imitating his Father in reality, no longer in image, to make known to us the Divine in a form that we could receive." Crouzel, *Origen*, 69-–70.

[94] Heb 10:19–22; emphasis mine.

find use of this same word elsewhere. He finds that ἱλαστήριον is also the word for the Ark of the Covenant's elaborate golden cover (the "mercy seat"), and concludes that there must be a link between the ark and Christ. More specifically, the link must be typological: "Indeed, it is worth the trouble to investigate the manner in which that object, described in Exodus as having been made of pure gold, has become the form and figure [*forma et figura*] of the true Propitiatory."[95] Each component of the ark is paired with a distinct element of Christ's person. Ultimately, the ark itself, by which Origen means its essential structure, "can be understood of his holy flesh [*caro*] in which [his] blessed soul is placed, possessing within itself the testimonies of God which are understood as matters of Christ prophesied in times past by the divine testimonies as to what sufferings he would endure in the flesh."[96] The "testimonies" of God, that is, the stone tablets, are placed within the Ark of the Covenant, just as the soul of Jesus and the "testimonies" concerning him are found within his flesh. As forced as it might sound, Origen is merely reading the text in a figural manner by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual things" (see 1 Cor 2:13), thereby attempting to enact the words of St Paul as found in his first letter to the Corinthians.

But in reading Origen, one cannot simply divide the "literal" from the "figural" to determine what is "real," because for him, the figural may be no less real than the literal. Is Origen speaking of "real" flesh when he states that the Word of God was "brought to humans" through Moses and the prophets, and "covered with

[95] *ComRm* 3.5.3; 3.8.3 in Scheck.

[96] Ibid., 3.5.9; 3.8.7 in Scheck.

the veil of the flesh"?[97] Clearly, the prophets did not cover him in fleshly matter, made up of muscle tissue and fat, but this scriptural "flesh" in Origen's work, figural though it may be, appears no less real in its capacity to act *as* flesh. As we will soon see, Origen often uses the term "flesh" in an unfamiliar way. For him, it can be used as a broad, general term, denoting that which the Logos assumes, or becomes, in order to make himself visible to humanity. It may include the bodily Incarnation, but it is not necessarily identical to it.

This becomes apparent in yet another of Origen's rebuttals to Celsus, where Celsus questions whether God could have possibly assumed a human body in the first place. Such an assumption, he argues, would entail change or alteration on God's part:

> God is good and beautiful and happy, and exists in the most beautiful state. If then he comes down to men, he must undergo change, a change from good to bad, from beautiful to shameful, from happiness to misfortune, and from what is best to what is most wicked. Who would choose a change like this? It is the nature only of a mortal being to undergo change and remolding, whereas it is the nature of an immortal being to remain the same without alteration. Accordingly, God could not be capable of undergoing this change.[98]

Origen naturally takes issue with the notion that God has undergone an actual change in assuming a body. In fact, he argues, the gods of the Epicureans are really the ones who undergo change as a result of their atomism, and the god of Stoicism undergoes change with each conflagration.[99] On the other hand, the Word who was "in the form of God" did not move from good to bad, from beautiful to shameful, or from happiness to misfortune as Celsus charges. Rather, out of love for humanity, he

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[97] *HomLev* 1.1.

[98] *CCels* 4.14.

[99] Ibid.

reached down that humanity might be capable of receiving him. Origen draws on a medical analogy, noting that when a physician sees and touches gruesome injuries, or treats those with severe illnesses, the physician does not himself pass from good to bad.[100] The same holds true of the Word who takes on flesh. "If the immortal divine Word assumes both a human body and a human soul, and by so doing appears to Celsus to be subject to change and remolding, let him learn that the Word remains Word in essence. He suffers nothing of the experience of the body or the soul."[101]

While Origen's third-century language may not be up to fifth-century standards, Celsus' claim has forced Origin to articulate certain points he may not have otherwise addressed. Indeed, it leads him to consider not only how the Word assumes flesh (changelessly), but also why:

> But *sometimes*, coming down to the one who is unable to behold the radiance and splendor of his divinity, he becomes as if flesh [σὰρξ], being spoken of in bodily terms, until the one who has received him like this, being raised up by the Word little by little, is able even to gaze upon, so to speak, his primary form.[102]

Immediately noticeable is the fact that he has shifted from a discussion about the bodily Incarnation to what sounds like the more general and even occasional taking on of flesh for the benefit of particular individuals. Indeed, he implies that the Word is able to take on flesh as he wills, even "sometimes" or "now and then."[103] This "becoming flesh" appears to be a transitory action on the part of the Word, meant

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[100] Ibid., 4.15.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid., trans. and emphasis mine. Συγκαταβαίνων δ'ἔσθ' ὅτε τῷ μὴ δυναμένῳ αὐτοῦ τὰς μαρμαρυγὰς καὶ τὴν λαμπρότητα τῆς θειότητος βλέπειν οἱονεὶ « σὰρξ » γίνεται, σωματικῶς λαλούμενος, ἕως ὁ τοιοῦτον αὐτόν παραδεξάμενος κατὰ βραχὺ ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου μετεωριζόμενος δυνηθῇ αὐτοῦ καὶ τήν ἵν' οὕτως ὀνομάσω, προηγουμένην μορφὴν θεάσασθαι.

[103] ἔσθ' ὅτε, from ἐστὶν ὅτε, which literally means "there is a time when," but is idiomatic for "now and then" or "sometimes."

primarily to draw individuals upward until they are capable of gazing upon "his primary form." Origen will go on specifically to contrast these occasional accommodations with the "one special descent" of the Logos,[104] and elsewhere notes that "the Word on earth is not like the Word in heaven, inasmuch as he has become flesh and is expressed by means of a shadow and types and images" (ἅτε γενόμενους σὰρξ καὶ διὰ σκιᾶς καὶ τύπων καὶ εἰκόνων λαλούμενος).[105]

Unless Origen means that the Word has assumed literal human flesh on multiple occasions, he is speaking of flesh "figuratively" here, but the fact that this flesh is figurative makes it no less real. It makes the Word manifest. When individuals are unable to view the Word in his absolute form, he becomes flesh in an act of accommodation, and though they initially require him in this corporeal form, the Word draws their gaze upward until they can look upon his "absolute form."[106] This was true of his physical manifestation in the Incarnation, and it is also true of the scriptural flesh he puts on as a garment.[107]

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[104] Ibid., 4.17.

[105] *ComJn* 2.49.

[106] In his *Commentary on Romans* (7.5.3), written just prior to *Contra Celsus*, he refers to the flesh as a form "which he took up in order that [*ad hoc*] he might teach the untrained and the ignorant the fear of God" (*quam suscepit ad hoc ut rudes et ignaros timorem Dei doceret*). One of the principal reasons the Logos takes on flesh is to provide a beginning, or a starting point in the journey for those who wish to have knowledge of him. See also *ComJn* 1.107: "But in his relation to us the beginning of learning is "the Word became flesh," that he might dwell among us *who are able to receive him only this manner at first*" (emphasis mine).

[107] Gerald Bostock links Origen's arguments in this portion of *Contra Celsus* with his language of "clothing" as a means of understanding the kenotic activity of the Logos (for example, in *HomLev* 1.1). He writes, "The metaphor of clothing is theologically important because it carries with it the idea that Christ can change from one state to another while yet remaining the same in essence; he can put on the body as an outer garment without undergoing any change in his inner being. It means therefore that he does not have to lay aside his essential divinity in order to enter the human world, or that he himself changes from being divine to being human." Gerald Bostock, "Origen's Exegesis of the Kenosis Hymn," in *Origeniana Sexta: Origène et la Bible*, ed. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 118 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 538.

The Epinoiai as Noetic Realities

Approaching the question of "reality" from a different angle, we might look again at the *epinoiai*. Because the vast majority of them are drawn from phrases that sound distinctly metaphorical (e.g., "I am the gate," "I am the vine," etc.), it is tempting to assume that they are, by and large, not realities. Yet in the *Commentary on John*, this is not so. When Origen writes, for example, that the Son "becomes" the Light of Men when men enter into darkness, he means just that. The Son truly becomes light. That light, however, is not sensible. Rather, it is noetic. It is perceived not with the eyes, but with the intellect:

> But since [the sun, moon, and stars] are lights perceived by the senses, which are said in Moses to have come into existence on the fourth day, they are not the true light because they enlighten the things on the earth. The Savior, on the other hand, is the light of the noetic world [ὁ νοητός κόσμος] because he shines on those who are rational and intellectual, that their mind may see its proper visions. Now I mean he is the light of those rational souls which are in the sensible world, of which the Savior teaches us that he is the maker, being, perhaps, its directing and principal part, and, so to speak, the sun of the great day of the Lord … But Christ, who is the Light of the World, is the true light in contradistinction to that which is perceptible by the senses, since nothing perceptible by the senses is true. It does not follow, however, that because that which is perceptible by the senses is not true, it is false. For what is perceptible by the senses can have a resemblance to that which is apprehended by the intellect. Everything which is not true certainly cannot correctly be designated false.[108]

It seems the *epinoiai* do not merely *describe* the various aspects of the Son's redemptive activity. They *are* the Son's various redemptive activities. He is not like light. He is light. He is the true light, perceptible to the intellect, or *nous*. Indeed, he becomes what we might term "noetic light," and despite its immaterial nature, this

[108] *ComJn* 1.161, 167; modified Heine.

noetic light is no less real than the light of the sun.[109] In fact, it is more real by virtue of its noetic quality.[110] Consequently, Origen does not maintain that "immaterial" or "metaphorical" are synonymous for "false" or "non-existent." The choice is not between real and immaterial, but rather between what is perceptible to the senses and what is perceptible to the *nous*. Neither is false, but the latter is actually truer.[111]

The Body of Christ as a "Type"

Finally, Origen indicates in the *Commentary on John* that some of the more figural or metaphorical "bodies" of Christ are actually *truer* bodies than the one he assumed in the Incarnation. In Book Ten, for example, he recounts the narrative of Jesus and the temple merchants. After he overturns the merchants' tables, the Jews demand a sign from him, by which he might prove his authority to drive them out. As the story goes, Jesus responds not with a miracle, but with the audacious claim,

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[109] Origen does not comment on whether this "becoming" entails genuine change on the part of the Son. However, given his insistence that the Word did not undergo any change in assuming a body, it is unlikely that he would so flippantly concede the point here. It is much more likely that he is again speaking of the *epinoiai* as the Son's "works and powers," as referenced in *PArch* 1.2.4. When he *acts* as the Light of the World for those who require it, he becomes a truer light than the light of the sun.

[110] The result of this, of course, is that ascending the hierarchy of names is, above all, a noetic task. In relation to "noetic exegesis," Blossom Stefaniw remarks, "Truths must be accessed through the text. A superficial reading of the text fails to render intelligible truth. Thus another type of reading is necessary. Since intelligible truths can be comprehended by the *nous*, the text must be read by an individual who has adequately activated his *nous* and will be read better the more advanced in noetic development the reader is." Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, and Commentary*, 364.

[111] Origen provides further insight on this difference of perception in his first homily on Genesis: "But all who see are not equally enlightened by Christ, but individuals are enlightened according to the measure in which they are able to receive the power of the light. And just as the eyes of our body are not equally enlightened by the sun, but to the extent that one shall have ascended to higher places and contemplated its risings with a gaze from a higher vantage point, to such an extent will he perceive more of both its splendor and its heat. So also to the extent that our mind shall have approached Christ in a more exalted and lofty manner and shall have presented itself nearer to the splendor of his light, to such an extent will it be made to shine more magnificently and clearly in his light as also he himself says through the prophet: 'Draw near to me and I shall draw near to you,' and again he says: 'I am a God who draws near, and not a God afar off'" (*HomGn* 1.7).

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). The author of the gospel informs the reader that Jesus was speaking not about the physical temple, but about his own body. The implication is clear. His body is the true temple. In response, Origen states the following:

> Both, however, (I mean the temple and Jesus' body) according to one interpretation, appear to me to be a type [τύπος] of the Church, in that the Church, being called a "temple," is built of living stones, becoming a spiritual house "for a holy priesthood," built "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the chief corner stone."[112]

Remarkably, Origen states that the body of Jesus is a *typos* of the church, rather than the other way around. Of course, Origen's intention is not to lessen the importance of Jesus' body. Rather, as Origen has always insisted, that which is purely corporeal is not ultimately the point. For Origen, Jesus did not assume flesh merely for the sake of entering into history, but rather he entered into history through the flesh for something much more profound and much more real. Henri de Lubac elucidates Origen's meaning in this way:

> This ecclesial body—what would later be called the "Mystical Body" –must thus be said, in Origen's language, to be "truer" than the former, because it constitutes a more perfect, fuller realization of the divine design. It is the end of which the other is the means. It is the reality of which the other, in its very reality, is the "type", the symbol. The historical life of the Savior symbolizes a broader life, that of his "true and perfect body."[113]

The church is the "true and perfect body" of Jesus. For this body to be real, it need not be purely corporeal or literally carnal. Indeed, that which is not corporeal can be more real than that which is. Though the church is a physical reality in that it cannot exist apart from the physical beings that make it up, it is not merely the sum of its corporeal parts. What makes the church a truer body than the physical body of Jesus

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[112] *ComJn* 10.228.

[113] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 411–12.

is the fact that it is the realization and fulfillment of all Jesus came to do.[114] As a result, there is no reason to believe that Origen perceives the Scriptures to be a lesser type of "incarnation." The language is figural, but by Origen's own standards, it is a true incarnation nonetheless.

Implications

When Origen states that the Word "becomes flesh" in the Scriptures, we need no longer question the reality of his statement. Scripture is one of the "occasional" ways in which the Logos becomes flesh. The Word is just as present, just as "incarnate" in the words of the prophets as he is in the body. He reveals himself to the senses by means of the letter, and the intellect must then search for the spiritual sense. He reveals himself by putting on a "garment" of names, thereby drawing the vision of the reader upward until he/she is capable of knowing him in his absolute form. There are a number of implications. First, this suggests that the "veil of the flesh" and the "veil of the letter" are not meant only to be lifted or penetrated. Though Origen does use this kind of language often, "flesh" is not always something that conceals. It is very often meant to do the very opposite, *revealing* the Word for those who are not capable of seeing him in his absolute form.[115] Before moving past the veil, each individual must first look upon the veil with the eyes of the intellect,

[114] For more on the notion of the church as the body of Christ in Origen's work, see Verlyn Verbrugge, "Origen's Ecclesiology and the Biblical Metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William Petersen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 277–94.

[115] Origen writes, "He 'was in the beginning with God,' but because of those who had cleaved to the flesh and become as flesh, he became flesh, that he might be received by those incapable seeing him in his nature as the one who was the Logos, who was with God, who was God" (*CCels* 6.68). In fact, Origen appears to believe that the *primary* purpose of the "veil of the flesh" is to reveal, and that the "concealing" element is secondary: "For he was sent not only that he might be known [ἵνα γνωσθῇ], but also that he might be hidden [ἀλλ' ἵνα καὶ λάθῃ]" (*CCels* 2.67). See also *CCels* 2.72; 4.15, 19.

ascending Mount Tabor to see the "garments of the Word" transfigured and radiant with light. The garments themselves thus hold substantial revelatory power.

Second, while the reality of Jesus' physical flesh is crucial for Origen, and though he often stresses its corporeal nature in contrast to docetic thinkers, he seems to consider it a very basic and generally settled issue. More important is the revelatory role of the flesh. The flesh of the Logos is that which makes him visible to humanity. It allows him to be known in the first place, and being known is ultimately his most fundamental desire. Not surprisingly, this has been problematic for some. R.P.C. Hanson writes, "It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Incarnation was to Origen no more than a necessary device employed by God as an important stage in the process of fully revealing himself."[116] There is in fact truth to this, but we must always be careful to distinguish in Origen's thought between the Incarnation as an act of revelation, and the Incarnation as it relates to the cross. In the case of the former, Origen would likely concede that the body of Jesus does not play a greater revelatory function than, for example, Scripture. However, the Scriptures were not nailed to a cross. Jesus' body was, and we have already seen that the cross plays an absolutely fundamental role in Origen's work. Indeed, de Lubac points out that for Origen, "the mystery of Christ is most particularly the mystery of his cross."[117] The cross is in the background of nearly every exegetical decision he makes, and Origen himself states, "The whole Old Testament preaches Christ crucified."[118] We cannot

[116] Hanson, *Allegory & Event*, 284.

[117] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 198.

[118] *ComPs* 68.23.

ignore the place of the cross in his work, and therefore cannot ignore the place of prominence he gives to the bodily Incarnation.

Finally, we have now seen that there are two requirements for recognizing the divine Word of God in the Scriptures: reading them in light of the Passion, and ascending the hierarchy of names within them. But these are not two separate *paths*. They are equally necessary, and as we shall see, closely related. We might say that the former involves "lifting" the veil, whereas the latter involves seeing the veil "transfigured." Origen demonstrates this connection in a unique passage from his *Homilies on Numbers*. He does not consider only obvious titles for Christ to be among the *epinoiai*, such as "the light of the world" or "the bread of life." He also creatively draws on other scriptural terms and phrases which may not technically be names at all. For example, Paul writes to the Corinthians: "I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not read, for you are still of the flesh." Clearly, these are not titles, but Origen cleverly takes the terms and interprets them as *epinoiai*: "To one [the Word] becomes 'the rational milk which is without guile,' … to another who is weaker he becomes like an 'herb'; while to another who is perfect, 'solid food' is given."[119] Once more, the Word takes on these titles as an act of accommodation. But, tying this chapter together with the previous one, he only becomes "solid food," or "meat" when he is consumed as the *crucified* Christ, and when he is consumed as the crucified Christ, Origen teaches that the "solid food" is equivalent to the "flesh of the Word of God":

> But you should look to the true lamb, "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and say that "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed." Let the Jews eat lamb's flesh in a carnal sense, but let us eat the flesh of the Word of God; for he himself said: "Unless you eat my flesh, you will not have life

[119] *CCels* 4.18. See also *ComCt* 1.4.

> in yourselves." *What we are now saying is the flesh of the Word of God, but only if we set it forth not as "vegetables" for the weak or as the nourishment of "milk" for children.* If we speak what is perfect, robust, and strong, we are setting out the flesh of the Word of God for you to eat. For where there are mystical words, where there are doctrinal and solid words that are brought forth in a way that is filled with faith in the Trinity, when the mysteries of the spiritual law of the age to come are expanded on, once the "veil of the letter has been removed"; when the soul's hope is torn away from the earth and cast toward heaven and is located in those things that "eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have they ascended into the heart of man." All these things are the flesh of the Word of God.[120]

In this passage, Origen inventively alters the Pauline metaphor by replacing the notion of spiritual "solid food" with the "flesh of the Word of God," or rather equating them. This "flesh" actually becomes the opposing counterpart to the "milk." The role of the Passion and the role of the *epinoiai* are not therefore entirely distinctive from one another. As Origen himself says, "From the garments of the Word of God, therefore, which denote the teachings of wisdom, myrrh proceeds, a symbol surely of the death he underwent for humankind" (*A vestimentis ergo Verbi Dei, quae est doctrina sapientiae, myrrha procedit, mortis dumtaxat indicium pro humano genere susceptae*).[121] Scaling the hierarchy of names requires reading those names in light of the crucified Christ. Only then can one encounter the divine Word of God in the text. In Part Two, we will examine the manifold ways in which Origen describes these "encounters," looking first to the issue of time before turning to the consumption of the Word.

[120] *HomNum* 23.6; emphasis mine.

[121] *ComCt* 2.10.10.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETER

CHAPTER FOUR

TIME, SCRIPTURE, AND THE NOETIC COMING OF CHRIST

> "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." The Jews then said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."
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> John 8:56–58

In the previous chapter, we looked at how Scripture functions as flesh, and how the individual can encounter Christ through its accommodative words and phrases. In this chapter, we will address those individual encounters in greater detail, specifically the nature and meaning of those encounters for those who lived *before* and *after* Christ's historical Incarnation. By examining, first, the way in which Origen speaks about the "coming of Christ" as an individualized noetic phenomenon, and second, the way he describes the relationship between Christ, the Scriptures, and the Old Testament "saints," I will argue that for Origen, scriptural interpretation allows for any individual to encounter the incarnate Word, in the fullest sense, at any time.[1] As we proceed through this chapter, we will find that Origen does not perceive

[1] Though this chapter necessarily touches on Origen's understanding of time, I do not intend to produce a definition of time according to Origen, or to look at time as an abstract concept within his work. Panayiotis Tzamalikos has already done just that, arguing that Origen produced a distinctive and original Christian understanding of time for which he was never properly credited. According to Tzamalikos, Origen's point of departure was the early Stoic perception of time as extension (διάστημα), found in the philosophy of Zeno and Chrysippus. And yet he goes beyond the Stoic conception, introducing the additional term συμπαρεχτείνεσθαι ("to be stretched out alongside with"). Time is "measured alongside with" life, and space, yet is entirely distinctive from them. Ultimately, Origen perceives time as a kind of "being" made out of non-being. It is an incorporeal, motionless "creature." Tzamalikos claims that this view was adopted by later Christian writers like Augustine, and is still mistakenly attributed to him. See P. Tzamalikos, *The Concept of Time in Origen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991); "Origen and the Stoic View of Time," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 4 (1991): 535–61; "The Concept of Space-Time in Origen," *Diotima* 24 (1996): 144–49; *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

the chronological progression of moments, events, or even ideas to be fundamentally consequential. While acknowledging that Christ came after Moses in a historical sense, and that the New Testament follows the Old, Origen does not see these chronological progressions as meaningful realities for the individual reader.

By the conclusion of the chapter, we will have recognized that scriptural interpretation is, for Origen, the primary means by which one experiences Christ. To borrow the words of Rowan Greer, "Origen virtually *identifies* the spiritual life with the interpretation of Scripture."[2] For both exegete and audience, Scriptural interpretation is not only one path among many along the spiritual life. It is the most foundational path. It is the long and steep road up Mount Tabor, and it is one each individual must travel if they wish to behold the transfigured Christ.

The Relative Coming of Christ in the *Commentary on John*

Origen is not always referring to the bodily Incarnation when he speaks of the Word "becoming flesh." We saw that from time to time, he speaks of occasional, even transitory "incarnations." The Word "sometimes" (ἔσθ' ὅτε) becomes flesh, and by becoming flesh he gradually increases the noetic capacity of each individual until he or she is capable of gazing upon his primary, or absolute form. In light of this, the importance of Jesus' Incarnation for Origen is not linked solely to its historical reality. More important for Origen is the specific salvific path of the individual. The Word becomes flesh for each person in unique ways, times, and places.

As a result, we should expect Origen to use comparable language when writing about the "coming" or "sojourn" (παρουσία or ἐπιδημίας) of Christ, in a more

[2] Rowan Greer and James Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, Library of Early Christianity 3 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 180; emphasis mine.

general sense (i.e., beyond the vocabulary of "flesh"). Though Origen understands the sojourn of Christ to be a historical reality in that Christ was truly born and truly lived on this earth, I intend to show that, for him, it is more fundamentally a noetic reality. And, as a noetic reality, it is not limited to the confines of first-century Palestine. Rather, his coming is specific to each individual, and is inextricably bound up with the reading and interpretation of Scripture.

The critical starting point for this discussion is a problematic passage found in the *Commentary on John*. In the well-known prologue to that work,[3] Origen spends a considerable amount of time delineating the nature and content of the term "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον), putting forth a series of prospective definitions, and applying those definitions to a variety of scriptural books. Some texts are more appropriately designated "gospel" than others. Some are not technically "gospel" at all. And yet, after taking his readers through this long and serpentine discussion, he ultimately states that "since the Savior has come" (ὁ δὲ σωτὴρ ἐπιδημήσας), *all* things are made gospel, whether it be the Law, the prophets, or the various letters of the apostles.[4] But crucially, this "coming" is not necessarily a fixed historical event. Rather, in his own words, "Christ came noetically [νοητός] even before he came in a body." Already, Origen begins to relativize the coming of Christ, but to what extent? To whom did he come? The full passage (*ComJn* 1.37) reads thus:

> We must not fail to remark, however, that Christ came noetically even before he came in a body. He came to the more perfect and to those who were not

[3] *ComJn* 1.1–89. In most editions, this section is not explicitly demarcated as a "prologue," but there can be no doubt that Origen meant it as such. In it, Origen not only defines his terms, like εὐαγγέλιον, but also explicitly seeks to justify the need for such a comprehensive commentary. It is not until 1.90 that he turns to the text of the gospel itself. For more on the prologues of Origen's works, see Ronald Heine, "The Prologues of Origen's Pauline Commentaries and the Schemata Isagogica of Ancient Commentary Literature," *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001): 421–39.

[4] *ComJn* 1.33; emphasis mine.

> still infants or under pedagogues and tutors, in whom the noetic "fullness of time" was present, as, for example, the patriarchs, and Moses the servant, and the prophets who contemplated the glory of Christ.[5]

Before his bodily appearance, Christ "came" to individuals like Moses and the prophets. The implication is that time is inconsequential for those living prior to the historical Incarnation. But what about those living after it? Does Christ "come" in this noetic manner to all peoples in all times? Origen addresses these questions in the very next section (*ComJn* 1.38), but he does so in exceptionally ambiguous Greek. As a result, the variety of plausible interpretations is strikingly diverse.

The importance of these two passages (1.37 above, and 1.38 which follows) cannot be understated, and the merits of each proposed reading must be carefully weighed. Ronald Heine has produced the most recent major English translation of the *Commentary*, and despite taking license with the Greek in order to communicate a particular interpretation, his reading represents the "majority" position. It goes as follows:

> 1.37: We must not fail to remark, however, that Christ came spiritually even before he came in a body. He came to the more perfect and to those who were not still infants or under pedagogues and tutors, in whom the spiritual "fullness of time" was present, as, for example, the patriarchs, and Moses the servant, and the prophets who contemplated the glory of Christ.
>
> 1.38: But just as Christ visited the perfect before his sojourn which was visible and bodily, so also *he has not yet visited* those who are still infants after his coming which has been proclaimed, since they are "under tutors and governors" and have not yet arrived at "the fullness of time." The forerunners of Christ have visited them—words with good reason called "pedagogues" because they are suited to souls which are children—but the Son himself, who glorified himself as the Word who is God, has not yet visited them, because he awaits the preparation which must take place in men of God who are about to receive his divinity.[6]

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[5] Ibid., 1.37; modified Heine.

[6] Emphasis mine. The Greek text is as follows:

ComJn 1.37: Πλὴν οὐκ ἀγνοητέον Χριστοῦ ἐπιδημίαν καὶ πρὸ τῆς κατὰ σῶμα ἐπιδημίας τῆν νοητὴν γεγονέναι τοῖς τελειοτέροις καὶ οὐ νηπίοις οὐδὲ ὑπὸ παιδαγωγοὺς καὶ ἐπιτρὸπους ἔτι τυγχάνουσιν, οἷς τὸ νοητὸν τοῦ χρὸνου πλήρωμα ἐνέστη, ὥσπερ τοῖς πατριάρχαις καὶ Μωσεῖ τῷ θεράποντι καὶ τοῖς τεθεαμένοις Χριστοῦ τὴν δόξαν προφήταις.

ComJn 1.38: Ὥσπερ δὲ πρὸ τῆς ἐμφανοῦς καὶ κατὰ σῶμα ἐπιδημίας ἐπεδήμησε τοῖς τελείοις,

Scholarly disagreement rests primarily upon two interrelated issues: the relationship between sections 1.37 and 1.38, and the grammatical and theological role of "those who are still infants" (οἱ ἔτι νήπιοι) in 1.38. The primary problem is that the phrase "he has not yet visited" (with relation to "infants") is not actually in the Greek. This results in three possible interpretations. Grammatically, it may be that Christ *has* come to these "infants," it may be that Christ has *not yet* come to these "infants," or it may be that neither is explicitly the case.

The first possibility is that Origen means to say, "And just as before his visible and bodily sojourn, he came to those who are perfect, so also after his proclaimed coming [he came] to those who are still infants." That is, as a result of his "bodily sojourn," he has now come to all peoples, even spiritual infants. While not impossible, this interpretation is problematic primarily on the grounds of context. Immediately following this, Origen adds, "because" (ἅτε) or "inasmuch as [these infants] are 'under tutors and governors' and have not yet arrived at 'the fullness of time.'" It makes little sense to say that Christ has come to these spiritual infants as a result of their immaturity or imperfection. Indeed, Origen has just finished stating that Christ visited Moses and the prophets as a result of their being *more* perfect. No scholar has actually endorsed this view, however, and we can safely leave it behind.

Most, like Heine, have elected for the opposite interpretation. In their respective English and French editions, both Heine and Cécile Blanc have seen in

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οὕτω καὶ μετὰ τὴν κεκηρυγμένην παρουσίαν τοῖς ἔτι νηπίοις, ἅτε « ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους » τυγχάνουσι « καὶ οἰκονόμους » καὶ μηδέπω ἐπὶ τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ κρόνου ἐφθακόσιν – [οἷς] οἱ μὲν πρόδρομοι Χριστοῦ ἐπιδεδημήκασι, παισὶ ψυχαῖς ἁπμόζοντες λόγοι, εὐλόγως ἂν κληθέντες « παιδαγωγοί » – αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ υἱὸς ὁ δεδοξασμένος « θεὸς λόγος » οὐδέπω, περιμένων τὴν δέουσαν γενέσθαι προπαρασκευὴν τοῖς μέλλουσι χωρεῖν αὐτοῦ τὴν θεότητα ἀνθρώποις θεοῦ (SC 120:78).

The bracketed οἷς in 1.38 is an emendation to the Greek text found in the critical editions of both Erwin Preuschen (GCS 10) and Cécile Blanc (SC 120). I will address its significance below.

Origen's words a kind of symmetrical, or mirrored argument. Just as Christ came to some before his bodily Incarnation, so also *he has not yet come* to others even after that Incarnation. By this account, the passage is meant to highlight the individual or relative nature of Christ's coming at all times. Despite the importance and reality of his historical coming, Christ is not bound or limited by that coming. He comes to each person in a unique way at a unique moment. But this reading has not gone unchallenged.

In an article entitled, "Une fause symétrie," Mariette Canévet proposes a third possibility, and takes issue with the second on both grammatical and theological grounds.[7] First of all, she notes that Blanc (whom Heine follows) has unjustly included the phrase, "he has not yet come" in relation to those who are still infants ("*n'est-il pas encore venue* pour ceux qui cont restés de petits enfants").[8] In the Greek text, the negation, οὐδέπω, is not found until much later, and it is said not of "Christ," but specifically of the glorified Son, the "Word of God" (αὐτος δὲ ὁ υἱὸς ὁ δεδοξασμένος « θεὸς λόγος » οὐδέπω). Canévet therefore argues that Origen is making a distinction here, as he does elsewhere, between the crucified Christ and the glorified Word. The former has unquestionably come for all, though it takes great effort to encounter the latter. She convincingly pairs this with another nearby passage, where Origen states:

> And wherever it is necessary to preach the literal [σωματικός] gospel declaring among the carnal that we 'know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified,' we must do this. But whenever we find those who are established in the Spirit and are bearing fruit in him and desiring the heavenly

[7] Mariette Canévet, "Une fausee symétrie: La venue du Christ chez les parfaits dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testaments selon Origène, In Joh., I, VII, 37–40.," *Gregorianum* 75, no. 4 (1994): 743–49.

[8] SC 120:79; emphasis mine.

> wisdom, we ought to share with them the Word who was restored from being made flesh to what 'he was in the beginning with God' [τοῦ λόγου ἐπανελθόντος ἀπὸ τοῦ σεσαρκῶσθαι ἐφ' ὃ « ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν »].[9]

The crucified Christ has come to all and for all,[10] but the glorified Word of God is for those who are "established in the Spirit." We have encountered this distinction in previous chapters, and it plainly holds a place of prominence in Origen's theology. But if Canévet is right, where does that leave "those who are still infants"?

In Canévet's evaluation, the subject of the sentence actually changes, from Christ (as in 1.37), to "the forerunners of Christ" (οἱ πρόδρομοι Χριστοῦ), found in 1.38. That is, the forerunners of Christ, or the "words which are suited to souls which are children," have come to sojourn among those who are still spiritual infants, rather than Christ himself. In the critical editions of both Preuschen and Blanc, this reading seems grammatically unlikely, but Canévet rightly argues that this is the result of an unnecessary emendation to the Greek text. She notes that both editors insert the relative pronoun οἷς into the phrase [οἷς] οἱ μὲν πρόδρομοι Χριστοῦ ἐπιδεδημήκασι. The insertion of this pronoun, she protests, breaks what was meant to be a single proposition into two. Whereas Blanc, for example, begins a new sentence as a result ("Vers eux sont allés les précurseurs du Christ"), Canévet asserts that there need not be a break with the preceding text at all. She thus renders it, "après l'annonce de son avènement aussi, les précurseurs du Christ … sont venus."[11] There is thus no real

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[9] *ComJn* 1.43. In Chapter Two, we saw that for Origen, reading scripture in light of the crucified Christ is precisely what allows one to encounter the divine Word of God. The passage above does not, however, stand in opposition to that point. Here, Origen is speaking of the "literal" [σωματικός] gospel, or the mere fact of Christ's crucifixion. But as we have seen, the Passion itself, and the One who suffers it, must also be perceived with appropriate noetic vision.

[10] There is a sense, then, in which Canévet accepts the basic premise of the first interpretation, that Christ has also come to those who are yet infants. However, it is specifically the "crucified Christ," and she arrives at that conclusion for different reasons and substantially modifies it.

[11] Canévet, "Une fausee symétrie," 744.

symmetry here. This is not about Christ *not* coming to those who are still infants, or the coming of Christ as a relative phenomenon, but is rather about the role of the "forerunners" and their ability to guide these infants to the divine Word of God.

Ultimately, Canévet concludes that the proposed symmetry in this passage is entirely illusionary. It is forced. She attributes this not to a simple misreading or misunderstanding, but rather to "our modern spirit" and our desire to see sharp logic and balanced structure in all things.[12] This text is not about old versus new, or patriarchs versus apostles, but is rather about the various degrees of participation between the divine Word and any given individual.[13] It is about encountering the glorified Word of God "as he was in the beginning with God." This occurs on an individual basis, and only as the result of significant preparation. Pulling all of this together, Canévet proposes the following translation:

> De même qu'avant sa venue visible selon le corps, il est venu pour les parfaits, de meme, après l'annonce de son avènement aussi, les précurseurs du Christ, c'est-à-dire des discours adaptés à des âmes d'enfants et appelés à juste titre pedagogues, sont venus; mais le Fils lui-même, le Verbe de Dieu glorifié ne l'est pas encore, car il attend qu'ils aient reçu la formation dont ont besoin les hommes de Dieu qui doivent recevoir en eux sa propre divinité.[14]

This, then, is the third possible way of reading the text.

Having looked all three interpretations, we must ascertain which is correct. It is my view that while Canévet has rightly corrected a few problematic grammatical issues in the translations of Blanc and Heine, she ultimately does not grasp the full scope of what Origen is communicating. Though Blanc and Heine have taken

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[12] Ibid., 749.

[13] Ibid., 745.

[14] Ibid., 744.

liberties in their respective translations, they have in fact understood Origen rightly.

First of all, Canévet's reading creates as many problems as it resolves. For example, despite the very title of her article, "A False Symmetry," Origen's use of ὥσπερ … οὕτω in the opening of 1.38 appears to be a plain indication that there is at least some degree of symmetry in his words. Even if we accept that Blanc and Heine wrongly identified the nature of that symmetry, their interpretive decisions were not based simply on their "modern spirit," or an inherent need for structure. Second, in her proposed translation, Canévet either forgets or neglects to mention the way in which Origen describes "those who are still infants," specifically that they are "under tutors and governors" and that they "have not yet arrived at the fullness of time" (ἅτε « ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους » τυγχάνουσι « καὶ οἰκονόμους » καὶ μηδέπω ἐπὶ τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ κρόνου ἐφθακόσιν). She is right to identify what Origen does not say (that Christ "has not yet come" to these infants), but it is undoubtedly more problematic to ignore what he does say. As we shall see, these seemingly minor pieces of information provide the key to an accurate reading.

There are explicit similarities between sections 1.37 and 1.38. Origen mentions both "pedagogues and tutors," and the "fullness of time" in each. This overt repetition, or symmetry, serves as an important clue. In 1.37, we find that the "more perfect" are *not* under pedagogues and tutors, and that they *have* arrived at the fullness of time. In 1.38, on the other hand, we find that the spiritual "infants" *are* under pedagogues and tutors, and have *not* arrived at the fullness of time. While the negations switch, the phrases remain the same. The significance of these phrases ultimately lies in their source. Origen draws both from Paul's letter to the Galatians (4:1–7), where he writes the following:

> The heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

The significance of Origen's words can be found in Paul's words. When the fullness of time had come (ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου), God sent forth his Son (ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ). This phrase, "the fullness of time," considered in light of its original Pauline context, is therefore the true crux upon which this passage hangs. Origen is not merely borrowing the wording of Paul for the sake of convenience, but is actually addressing the very same subject: the coming of Christ.[15] For Paul, as well as for Origen, it is precisely *in* the fullness of time that Christ comes. Because, for Origen, "the noetic fullness of time" was present in the patriarchs and prophets, Christ came to them even before his historical Incarnation. The two propositions are unquestionably linked here in the *Commentary on John*, just as they are in Galatians.

It is therefore difficult not to see in Origen's words a kind of mirrored argument. His meaning appears to be deliberately symmetrical, though reversed. If these infants have not yet arrived at the fullness of time, then Christ has not yet come for them. To appropriate the wording of Paul, if the fullness of time has not come, then God has not sent forth his Son. Something significant is lost in rejecting this reading. Certainly, each individual participates in the divine Word differently, but to

[15] In this Galatians passage, we also see the notion of a dual "coming." God first sends forth his Son in a physical manner, "born of a woman," but he also sends the Spirit of his Son "into our hearts," in an immaterial way. While Origen is quite obviously taking this concept further than Paul, he is elaborating on a Pauline idea, rather than simply borrowing a convenient Pauline phrase.

leave it at that misses the profundity of what Origen is saying here. As curious as it might sound, "the fullness of time" is relative. As a result, to phrase it more starkly, the coming of Christ is relative to each individual, even now.[16]

For Origen, Christ's historical coming is not his truest coming. His truest coming occurs on an individual basis. Recall that in his discussion of Christ's body, Origen wrote, "Not everyone who laid eyes on him was able to see him. They saw his body, but insofar as he was Christ, they could not see him."[17] Just as his material body could not guarantee a proper understanding of his identity, so also his historical coming cannot guarantee a genuine encounter with him. He must come to each person, and each person must arrive at his/her own "fullness of time." For Origen, this is true whether one is living five hundred years before Christ, or two thousand years after him. As relativistic (or post-modern) as it might sound, Origen professes this unreservedly right in the midst of the third century.

Scripture and the "Noetic" Coming of Christ

If Christ's coming is relative to each individual, we must also ascertain the manner of that "coming." As a means of underscoring the sense of contrast in this passage, some scholars have referred to this non-corporeal coming as "spiritual," placing it in opposition to that which is material. In the respective translations of

[16] This is also reflected in *HomJer* 9.1–2: "According to the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ as historically told, his dwelling was in a body and a kind of universal event which illuminated the whole world, when 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' … However, it is necessary to know that he was also dwelling prior to this, yet not in a body, in each of the holy ones. And after this visible dwelling, he dwells in us again … And I could say that Christ was with Moses, with Jeremiah, with Isaiah, with each of the righteous, and what he said with the disciples, 'Behold I am with you all the days until the end of the age' is observed in fact and realized before his sojourn. For he was with Moses and he was with Isaiah and with each of the holy. How can they have spoken the word of God if the Word of God did not dwell in them?"

[17] *HomLc* 3.3.

Heine and Blanc, we read that "Christ came *spiritually*" or that there was "une venue *spirituelle* du Christ" (emphasis mine). Furthermore, this coming took place in what they refer to as the "*spiritual* fullness of time" ("la plénitude *spirituelle* des temps").[18] In his study of Origen and time, Panayiotis Tzamalikos further disseminates this language:

> Thus Origen holds the doctrine of the "spiritual advent" of the Logos as a perpetual manifestation of God into the world. The "presence" of the Logos then may suggest either his "spiritual advent" before his Incarnation, or the corporeal presence of Christ in the world, or his presence thereafter, or even "the prominent and glorious" presence of Christ expected in the consummate of the world.[19]

Whereas Christ's corporeal coming is physically grounded and historical, his spiritual coming is immaterial and timeless, as it were. The contrast appears neat and tidy. However, the word "spiritual" is notoriously vague in definition. In this context, it might have any number of meanings. Perhaps Christ appeared to the patriarchs and prophets in a specifically non-material manner. Perhaps Origen is saying that Christ appeared to these individuals *as* a spirit. Or, perhaps he is indicating that Christ appeared to the individual spirits of Moses and the prophets. But in *ComJn* 1.37, Origen does not actually use the term "spiritual" (πνευματικός) to describe either the coming of Christ or the fullness of time. Rather, he uses the word "noetic" (νοητός). That which is νοητός is, more literally, that which is apprehended by the intellect, or *nous*. If we exchange "spiritual" for "noetic," the meaning of this passage becomes both narrower and clearer. The "fullness of time" and the "coming of Christ" are

[18] Emphasis mine. I have included Heine's translation above. Blanc renders 1.37 this way: "Cependant il ne faut pas ignorer qu'il y a eu, même avant sa venue dans un corps, une venue spirituelle du Christ pour les hommes arrivés à une certaine perfection, qui n'étaient plus des enfants sous l'autorité de pédagogues ou d'intendants et pour qui avait été réalisée la plénitude spirituelle des temps: les patriarches, Moïse le serviteur, les prophètes qui ont contemplé la gloire du Christ." SC 120:79.

[19] Tzamalikos, *The Concept of Time in Origen*, 267.

related specifically to the noetic capacity of the individual. Furthermore, to revisit an earlier point, a noetic encounter is no less real than a material encounter one. Quite the opposite. It is truer. A noetic encounter can be more real, more vivid, more palpable, and more transformative. It is that which the material coming of Christ represents in "type." The term "spiritual," with all its ambiguity, simply does not suffice. Ultimately, as we shall see, Origen is talking about something specific and concrete. He is talking about a noetic encounter with Christ in the Scriptures:

> You too, therefore, if you shall always search the prophetic visions, if you always inquire, always desire to learn, if you meditate on these things, if you remain in them, you too receive a blessing from the Lord and dwell "at the well of vision." For the Lord Jesus will appear to you also "in the way" and will open the Scriptures to you so that you may say: "Was not our heart burning within us when he opened to us the Scriptures?" But he appears to these who think about him and meditate on him and live "in his law day and night."[20]

Jesus will appear to the reader, claims Origen, and will open up to him/her the very Scriptures within which he is found. Those who meditate on the word will become like the two disciples, walking with Christ on the road to Emmaus. Admittedly, this process is somewhat cyclical. One must search for Christ in the Scriptures to find him, and once he is found, he takes the reader back and, "beginning with Moses and the prophets," shows the reader all that they say concerning himself.[21] It is not, however, cyclical in the sense that there is no progress. It is rather the long and winding path upward, whereby each individual is constantly ascending, growing, and maturing. As one continues to search, Christ continues to appear ever more radiant and ever more luminous. The encounter itself becomes ever more substantial, until

[20] *HomGn* 11.3.

[21] See Lk 24:27.

the reader finds that the Scriptures are not a mere text, but the very Logos of God.[22]

In another critical passage, from the *Homilies on Joshua*, Origen explicitly notes that there is no division or separation between Christians today, and "those who were righteous before the coming of Christ." They are, in his own words, "still our brothers." They are "one flock and one shepherd, those former righteous ones and those who are now Christians" (*unus grex et unus pastor, illi priores iusti et qui nunc sunt Christiani*).[23] Once more, we see in his words an overt connection between the Old Testament saints and the many believers living after Christ's historical coming. Indeed, despite the immense quantity of time that lies between them, they share in Christ as their single shepherd. The reasoning, according to Origen, is their spiritual interpretation of the Law:

> For although they possessed an altar then, before the coming of the Savior, nevertheless, they knew and perceived that it was not that true altar [*altare verum*], but that it was a form and figure [*forma et figura*] of what would be the true altar. Those persons knew this because the true victims and those who were able to take away sins were not offered on that altar that the firstborn people possessed, but on this one where Jesus was. *Therefore* [*ergo*], they are made "one flock and one shepherd," those former righteous ones and those who are now Christians.[24]

It is the spiritual, or Christological interpretation of the Law that binds these ancient figures to the church, to the apostles, and to all those who have believed and obeyed Christ since his bodily coming. Though they do not share in the same time, and though they do not possess the books and letters of the New Testament, they

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[22] Thus, Marguerite Harl writes, "L'ordre progressif de la révélation, allant de la typologie à la vision de la vérité, se renouvelle pour chaque individu, selon le travail en lui de l'Esprit." And, further on, "Il ne s'agit plus des deux régimes, successifs dans le temps, de la Loi et de l'Evangile, mais de deux états successifs d'un même homme quand il passe d'une vie charnelle à une vie spirituelle." *Origène et la fonction révélatrice*, 161, 168.

[23] *HomJos* 26.3; see Jn 10:16.

[24] Ibid., emphasis mine.

witnessed the living Christ in their laws, their histories, their songs, and their prophecies.

The connection between the Christological reading of Scripture and the noetic coming of Christ has gone largely unexplored until now. As we shall see, passages like the above have led many scholars only to question whether, for Origen, the patriarchs and prophets possessed the same level of *knowledge* as the apostles.[25] It is an important question, but in addressing it, I intend to show that it is not an isolated question. For Origen, the noetic interpretation of the Law is precisely what brings about the noetic coming of Christ.

How Much Did the Patriarchs and Prophets Know?

Early in his career, Origen seems to waver on whether or not the patriarchs and prophets possessed knowledge equal to the apostles. If we look to the *Commentary on John*, for example, we will find that the question gradually becomes a source of tension for him. Earlier on, in Book Six, he appears confident of his position: "I wish to prove that those who have been perfected in former generations [τοὺς τετελειωμένους ἐν ταῖς προτέραις γενεαῖς] have known no less than the things which were revealed to the apostles by Christ, since the one who also taught the apostles revealed the unspeakable mysteries of religion to them."[26] He states with apparent certainty that Moses "saw in his mind [νοῦς] the truth of the Law and the allegorical

[25] See M. Harl, *Origène et la fonction révélatrice*, 160–171; R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory & Event*, 210–11; H. Crouzel, *Origen*, 77–78; Monika Pesty, "Origène et Les Prophètes," in *Origeniana Sexta: Origen and the Bible*, ed. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 411–16; John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 127–37.

[26] *ComJn* 6.24.

meanings related to the anagogic sense of the stories he recorded,"[27] that Joshua "understood the true [ἀληθής] distribution of land which took place after the overthrow of the twenty-nine kings,"[28] and that Isaiah "saw the mystery [μυστήριον] of the one seated on the throne."[29] However, by the time he reaches Book Thirteen, his confidence has somewhat subsided. He begins to vacillate, even to debate with himself.

Commenting on John 4:36 ("He who reaps receives a reward and gathers fruit for eternal life, that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together"), Origen concludes that the "sowers" must be Moses and the prophets, and that the "reapers" must be the apostles. According to the text, these two parties will rejoice "together," which leads Origen to question how and when that occurs:

> But if someone hesitates to accept that even now everyone who sows rejoices with everyone who reaps, let him consider the possibility that the Transfiguration of Jesus was a kind of harvest when he appeared in glory not only to the reapers, Peter, James, and John, who went up the mountain with him, but also to the sowers, Moses and Elias. For they rejoice together with them when they see the glory of the Son of God, which Moses and Elias *had not previously seen* [πρότερον οὐκ ἑωράκει], illuminated to such an extent by the Father and so illuminating those who beheld it. Consequently, Moses and Elias *now* see together with the holy apostles.[30]

Here, Origen proposes that Moses and Elijah had to wait until the bodily coming of Christ to witness his glory in full, with the Transfiguration acting as the defining moment.

However, he is not entirely satisfied with this solution, and enters into an internal debate: "Some will accept these interpretations readily," he notes, but

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[27] *ComJn* 6.22.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 6.23.

[30] Ibid., 13.310; emphasis mine.

"others will hesitate to assent to this, not daring to assert that so great a man as Moses and the prophets did not, during their earthly life, anticipate the things that have been understood by the apostles."[31] Considering a series of scriptural passages in support of either proposition, he notes that on the one hand, Jesus says, "Many prophets and just men desired to see the things that you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things that you hear, and did not hear them,"[32] but that on the other hand, Solomon says, "A wise man will understand the words from his own mouth, and upon his lips he bears knowledge."[33] Ultimately, he does not take a hard stance in this text.

As a result of this ambiguity, Origen's modern interpreters have occasionally used the passages above to their own advantage, fitting them to whichever position they themselves hold. Henri Crouzel, for example, claims that Origen's early view (as seen in Book Six) was a somewhat naive and reactionary response to the Marcionites: "Origen defends, sometimes protesting too much, the old covenant against the contempt in which the Marcionites held it: he seems anxious to equate the knowledge its saints enjoyed with that of the apostles for example in Book VI of the *Commentary on John*."[34] Then, on the rather unfounded assumption that Origen does

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[31] Ibid., 13.314.

[32] Mt 13:17

[33] Prv 16:23. Earlier, Origen cites a passage from Paul's epistle to the Romans, where we read that "the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages" is now revealed through "the prophetic writings" (Rom 16:25–26). Pairing this with the Proverbs text, Origen writes, "If the mystery which was kept secret long ago has been made manifest to the apostles through the writings of the prophets, and the prophets understood 'the words from their own mouth' because they were "wise,' the prophets knew the things which have been made manifest to the apostles" (*ComJn* 6.25).

[34] Crouzel, *Origen*, 77. There are indeed times in which Origen uses this argument to combat his theological opponents: "The heterodox think they can construct their impious dogma from this starting-point: that the Father of Jesus Christ was unknown to the saints of the Old Covenant. We say to them that the words 'to whom the Son wishes to reveal' apply not only to future time, about which the Savior spoke these words to us, but also to past time. For, the words, 'to reveal' in the aorist tense,

change his position, he notes that "Book XIII restores the balance."[35] Similarly, without considering the alternative, R.P.C. Hanson asserts that "Moses and Elijah *had not before seen* the glory of Christ illuminated as they saw it at the Transfiguration. They had up till then been awaiting 'the fullness of the time in which was fitting that at the unique advent of Jesus Christ things which were unique among anything in the world ever spoken or written should be revealed."[36] But we should perhaps take greater caution in our interpretation of Origen. Indeed, several factors strongly indicate that Origen continues to favor his original position, that Moses and the prophets possessed knowledge equal to the apostles, and therefore witnessed Christ in their own time.[37]

First, Origen takes a hard stance in Book Six. The presentation of an alternative interpretation in Book Thirteen does not necessitate the endorsement of that interpretation. Indeed, given the ambiguity of the passage, the burden of proof rests upon those who believe he has undergone a dramatic shift in thought. Second, near the conclusion of his internal debate, he contends that for Moses and the prophets, "it was a matter of waiting for the fullness of time."[38] We have already seen that this phrase holds immense theological weight for him. It is "in the fullness of time" that Christ comes. And, to revisit what we saw in the prologue, Jesus came

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apply to anyone in the past. To refute them we should use the Scripture passage that reads, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad'" (*FragmLc* 162).

[35] Crouzel, *Origen*, 77.

[36] Hanson, *Allegory & Event*, 210–11; emphasis mine.

[37] It is telling that Origen seems to equate knowledge with vision in the above passages. For him, if the patriarchs and prophets knew that which the apostles knew, they also saw that which the apostles saw.

[38] *ComJn* 13.319.

noetically to those "in whom the noetic fullness of time was present, as for example, the patriarchs, and Moses the servant, and the prophets who contemplated the glory of Christ."[39] It would be a mistake to separate these two passages from one another. One sheds light on the other. Finally, and most importantly, we must take into account what Origen has to say in his many other written works. Doing so proves the most damaging for Crouzel and Hanson. In the *Homilies on Leviticus*, the *Homilies on Numbers*, the *Homilies on Joshua*, the *Commentary on Romans*, and *Contra Celsus*, Origen makes it abundantly clear that patriarchs and prophets knew, in full, the meaning of their words, and thus "witnessed Jesus' day."[40] We might look, for example, at a passage in the *Homilies on Numbers*, where Origen is describing the individual who is able to ascend from the letter "to the splendor of the mystery and contemplate the light of the spiritual Law."[41] As his chief example, he turns not to one of the apostles, but to none other than Moses:

> Doubtless Moses understood what the true circumcision was. He understood what the true Passover was. He knew what the true new moons were and the true sabbaths. And although he had understood all these things in the Spirit [*et cum haec omnia intellexisset in spiritu*], he nevertheless kept them veiled by means of words through the forms and foreshadowing of physical realities. And though he knew that "Christ our true Passover had to be sacrificed," he commanded a physical sheep to be sacrificed at the Passover. And though he knew that the "feast day ought to be celebrated with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," nevertheless he gave instructions about the unleavened bread of flour. So this and things like this were the "Holy of Holies," which, although Moses handed down that it was to be carried by others, that is, it was to be fulfilled in reality and in works, yet he handed these things down covered up and veiled by means of a common communication of words.[42]

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[39] Ibid., 1.37. Similarly, when he writes in *HomEz* 14.2.3, "As long as my Lord had not come, the Law was closed," he is again speaking of the noetic coming of Christ.

[40] See Jn 8:56. See also *CCels* 4.49, 7.10; *ComRm* 1.10.2–3, 4.7.3; *HomJos* 26.3; *HomLev* 6.3.5; *HomNum* 5.1.3.

[41] *HomNum* 5.1.2.

[42] Ibid., 5.1.3. Though the dating of Origen's homilies is notoriously complex, we can be fairly certain that he composed his *Homilies on Numbers* (and therefore this passage) after he had

In these texts, we discover two fundamental points. First, that for Origen, Moses and the prophets did have equal knowledge to the apostles.[43] Though Christ had not yet come bodily, they knew that the whole of their Scriptures spoke of him, and indeed revealed him. Second, because they themselves composed those Scriptures, they willingly chose to veil the spiritual meaning of the text with seemingly plain words or insignificant stories. When Moses wrote of laws and wars, he also spoke of Christ. When David composed stirring songs and elegant poetry, he also spoke of Christ. When Jeremiah warned of material destruction and impending exile, he also spoke of Christ.[44] These individuals knew that the value of their words did not rest in their literal or historical meaning, but rather in their ability to reveal Christ.[45] Indeed, their

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already completed the *Commentary on John*. With few exceptions, his homilies were delivered in the latter portion of his life, during his time in Caesarea. Furthermore, internal references within the homilies suggest that he preached on the "historical books" (the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges) last, after he had already gone through the prophetic books and the "wisdom" books. Though Books 6–32 of the *Commentary on John* were also composed in Caesarea, evidence suggests that Origen completed them first thing, as he indicates in *ComJn* 6.11–12 ("For I thought it better to begin the remaining books now…"). For a concise English treatment of the dating of the homilies, see the introduction to R. Heine, trans., *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, FOTC 71 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 17–24. For fuller treatments, see Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*; and Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre*, 363–412.

[43] Indeed, he even writes in the *Commentary on John* that "the saints who preceded Jesus' bodily sojourn" had a "somewhat *greater* mental grasp than the majority of believers" (*ComJn* 6.17; emphasis mine).

[44] Much of this is also wrapped up in Origen's understanding of allegory. In order for the Scriptures to be read allegorically, they need to have been written allegorically. Thus, when Celsus charges that the Christians are ashamed of their Scriptures, and "take refuge in allegory" (*CCels* 4.48), Origen responds, "If Celsus had read the Bible impartially, he would not have said that our writings are incapable of being interpreted allegorically. For from the prophecies, in which events of history are recorded, it is possible to be convinced in a way which would not come from history alone that the histories also were written with an eye to an allegorical meaning, and were arranged very wisely to be exactly suited both to the multitude of simple-minded believers and to the few who have the desire or the capacity to examine the questions with intelligence … But since the very authors of the doctrines themselves and the writers interpreted these narratives allegorically, what else can we suppose except that they were written with the primary intention that they should be allegorized?" (*CCels* 4.49).

[45] On a closely related point, there has been confusion in the past over the degree to which the patriarchs and prophets actively participated in the composition of Scripture. Were they, for Origen, in a kind of trance, serving as passive instruments for the Holy Spirit's use? Did the Holy Spirit merely dictate to them? Or did they actively collaborate with the Spirit? At times, Origen admittedly emphasizes the role of the Spirit over the human writers, leading Crouzel to assert that

very purpose for writing was the revelation of Christ, and in a way, all else served as a veil for those yet incapable of encountering him.[46]

Furthermore, Origen does not limit this knowledge of Christ to the biblical authors alone. In his *Homilies on Leviticus*, for example, while commenting on the garments of the high priest, he remarks that the true high priest is the one who knows the true meaning of the Law and the "reasons for each mystery."[47] Thus, "This high priest [Aaron] whom Moses ordained at that time knew that circumcision was spiritual [*spiritalis*], yet he also observed the circumcision of the flesh because the high priest could not be uncircumcised … He knew also that spiritual sacrifices ought to be offered to God, yet he was offering carnal sacrifices nonetheless."[48] Because the high priest knew these things, reasons Origen, he was required to wear two tunics: one for the "ministry of the flesh" and another for "spiritual understanding [*intelligentia spiritalis*]" Any individual prior to Christ's bodily

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"Origen, like many of the ancient Fathers, had an inadequate idea of the inspiration of Scripture; he thought of it rather like a dictation. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible, the human author is of little account." *Origen*, 71. However, this assertion is based on limited evidence. In his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, Origen explicitly rejects the notion that the human authors were passive instruments, stating, "For it is not the case, as some people surmise, that the prophets were out of their minds and spoke by the Spirit's compulsion" (6.1.1). Indeed, everything we have seen up until this point should make it quite clear that Moses and the prophets were in full possession of their sanity, and collaborated with the Spirit even to the point of actively veiling the spiritual sense of the text with seemingly insignificant historical details. For more on this topic, see E. Nardoni, "Origen's concept of Biblical Inspiration," *Second Century*, 4 (1984): 9–23.

[46] Additionally, in *CCels* 7.10, Origen writes, "The prophets, according to the will of God, said without any obscurity whatever could be at once understood as beneficial to their hearers and helpful towards attaining moral reform. But all the more mysterious and esoteric truths, which contained ideas beyond the understanding of everyone, they expressed by riddles and allegories and what are called dark sayings, and by what are called parables or proverbs. Their purpose was that those who are not afraid of hard work but will accept any toil to attain to virtue and truth might find out their meaning by study, and after finding it might use it as reason demands."

[47] *HomLev* 6.3.4.

[48] Ibid., 6.3.5.

coming was therefore capable of perceiving that "the Law is spiritual."[49] Aaron understood this point just as well as Moses. As a result, he performed all of his ritual acts with an understanding of their full spiritual and Christological significance.[50]

I stated earlier that many modern commentators have not seen the question of knowledge as particularly relevant to the question of Christ's noetic coming. The two issues are treated separately, with two separate sets of implications. But, in doing so, one inevitably misses the point. Origen's discussion of the knowledge of the patriarchs and prophets is not simply an overly zealous response to Marcion. For Origen, these two issues are inextricably linked. *How* does Christ come to the patriarchs and prophets? Through the noetic interpretation of Scripture. *Why* does it matter that the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles possessed equal knowledge of the Scriptures? Because in the noetic reading of Scripture, Christ is truly met.

Origen describes this scriptural encounter with Christ in remarkably vivid terms in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. The bride in Solomon's poem exclaims, "Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills."[51] Inspired by the poetic nature of the text, Origen declares this of Christ, the leaping bridegroom:

> For Moses wrote of him, and so too the prophets foretold concerning him.

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[49] See Rom 7:14.

[50] For this reason, Marguerite Harl writes, "La venue du Christ n'a pas apporté la révélation d'une vérité *nouvelle*, mais seulement la *manifestation* d'une vérité ancienne." *Origène et la fonction révélatrice*, 162. See also what Origen writes of Abraham in his *Commentary on Romans*: "For when he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, he believed that God was able to raise him even from the dead; he believed as well that this matter would not only be accomplished at that time for Isaac but that the full truth of the mystery would be reserved for his seed, who is Christ. This, after all, is the reason he offered his only son with joy, because he was contemplating in him, not the destruction of posterity but the restoration of the world and the renovation of the entire creation which has been re-established through the resurrection of The Lord. This is why The Lord says of him, 'Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad'" (4.7.3; see Jn 8:56).

[51] Sg 2:8.

> This foretelling, of which we read in the Old Testament, has a veil on it, however; but when the veil is removed for the bride, that is, for the church that has turned to God, she suddenly sees him leaping upon those mountains—that is, the books of the Law; and on the hills of the prophetical writings he is so plainly and so clearly manifested that he springs forth, rather than merely appears. Turning the pages of the prophets one by one, for instance, she finds Christ springing forth from them and, now that the veil that covered them before is taken away, she perceives him breaking out and emerging from individual passages in her reading, and bursting out of them in a manifestation that is now quite plain.[52]

Here, more than anywhere else, Origen creates an explicit link between the noetic reading of Scripture and an authentic encounter with Christ. It is not theoretical, but living. It is not a matter of knowledge alone, but of experiencing the Logos springing forth and bursting out of Scripture's very pages.

In John David Dawson's book, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity*, Dawson asks one of the most natural questions in relation to the above: "If the patriarchs and prophets share the same knowledge as the apostles, what difference did the Incarnation make?"[53] The question itself is an intriguing one, but Origen is not the least bit concerned about it. That is because at the heart of Dawson's question is an assumption Origen simply does not share: that Christ assumed a body and entered into history in order to reveal himself more fully, and to

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[52] *ComCt* 3.11. *Sed et alio modo potest intelligi, sicut supra iam diximus, quoniamquidem Moyses de ipso scripsit et prophetae nihilominus de ipso adnuntiaverunt. Sed et prophetae nihilominus de ipso adnuntiaverunt. Sed et haec adnuntiatio in lectione veteris testamenti velamen habet superpositum; ubi vero sponsae, ecclesiae scilicet ad Deum conversae, ablatum est velamen, subito videt eum in istis montibus, legis dumtaxat voluminibus, salientem et in collibus scripturae propheticae pro aperta et evidenti manifestione non tam apparentum quam exilientem, verbi gratia, quasi si revolvens singulas propheticae lectionis paginas inveniat de ipsis exilientem Christum et per loca singula lectionum ablato nunc demum quo prius tegebatur velamine ebullire eum cernat et emergere atque evidenti iam manifestatione prorumpere*.

[53] Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 129. John O'Keefe notes, "During the twentieth century, many readers of Origen worried that spiritual and allegorical reading of the Bible radically devalued history and causes Christianity to free float above the concrete and the particular … This perspective contributed to a general tendency within the academies that largely practiced historical criticism to reject all ancient Christian interpretation out of hand, not just that of Origen." "Scriptural Interpretation", *Westminster Handbook on Origen*, 195.

impart greater knowledge. For Origen, this is simply not so. Tzamalikos articulates the point best: "Origen would never have asserted that the Incarnation took place so that Christ appears in a sort of more concrete and tangible reality, so that men are forced to believe. The presuppositions required to accept the Logos of God are the same whether he is incarnated or not … If these presuppositions do not exist, a man cannot apprehend the Logos, even if he sees him incarnated in front of him."[54] For Origen, the Incarnation is not a concentrated means of revelation.[55] For him, to *know* the Logos is to see him. But seeing him, as we have found time and time again, is not to know him.[56] Thus, to answer Dawson's question, it is *because* the patriarchs and prophets know the very same Christ as the apostles that the Incarnation has any meaning beyond the first century AD. For Origen, their knowledge of Christ in the Scriptures gives the Incarnation greater meaning, because it spreads the significance of the Incarnation to all peoples, in all times and places. It is a knowledge that allows any individual to authentically experience Christ, to witness him bursting out of Scripture's pages in a true and tangible way, and to see him enfleshed before one's very eyes. However, it is again important to note that the Passion, which we have found to be at the very heart of Origen's theology, remains an event unique to

[54] Tzamalikos, *The Concept of Time in Origen*, 268–69.

[55] This is of course in stark contrast to what we find in some later Christian writers, where the Word becomes flesh specifically to make himself known to a humanity that had turned away from the divine in favor of the earthly. Most famous for this is perhaps Athanasius, who remarks, "Once the mind of human beings descended to perceptible things, the Word himself submitted to appear through a body, so that as a human he might bring humans to himself and return their sense perception to himself, and then, by their seeing him as a human being, he might persuade them through the works he effected that he is not a man only but God and the Word and Wisdom of the true God" (*On the Incarnation*, 16). Trans. J. Behr, *On the Incarnation*, Popular Patristics 44A (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011).

[56] This is not, of course, knowledge in the so-called "gnostic" sense, whereby one actually attains a kind of salvation through understanding. Nor is this a knowledge that is reserved for elite individuals. It is more like an intimacy, or an experience, comparable to the intimate knowledge shared between a husband and wife. We will explore this theme further below.

Christ's bodily and historical Incarnation. The Scriptures were not crucified as Jesus was in the body, and as we have seen, the historical crucifixion is in large part what allows for a timeless incarnation through scripture. The cross provides the lens by which one is able to perceive that Scripture is Christ, and Origen would apply this qualification equally to both Moses (who looks forward) and the contemporary reader (who looks back).

Ascending Mount Tabor

On occasion, Origen reverses the subject and the object, so that it is not Christ who visits the ancient saints, but they who visit him. When Origen speaks in this way, it is almost invariably set within the context of the Transfiguration narratives. Peter, James, and John were not the only figures with Jesus on Mount Tabor. At the moment of his transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared as well, and spoke with him. They too witnessed the glorified Christ. Origen links this narrative to a passage in the book of Numbers, where God reveals that he does not appear to Moses in visions alone, as he does with other prophets. Rather, he speaks with him "mouth to mouth," and Moses "beholds the form of the Lord" directly.[57] As is often his habit, Origen dehistoricizes what he finds there, and asks himself, "*When* did Moses see the glory of the Lord?" His answer: "I would say at that time when the Lord was transfigured on the mountain and Moses was present with him, together with Elijah, and they were conversing with him."[58] It is Moses who comes to Christ, rather than the other way around. But Origen does not treat this as a purely temporal encounter, as though this is the "first time" Moses witnessed Christ. This is because he treats

[57] See Nm 12:6–8.

[58] *HomNum* 7.2.3; emphasis mine.

Moses and Elijah not only as individual persons, but as symbols, or representatives of the whole of the Law and of all the prophets.[59] Jesus, furthermore, represents the whole of the gospel. For Origen, these three, the Law, the prophets, and the gospel, cannot be separated. They are one, and must always remain one. In his *Homilies on Leviticus*, he asks:

> Do you wish to see how Moses is always [*semper*] with Jesus, that is, the Law of the Gospels? Let the gospel teach you that when Jesus "was transformed" in glory, so also "Moses and Elijah appeared" at the same time with him so that you may know that the Law, the prophets, and the gospel always come as one and remain in one glory [*ut scias quia lex et prophetae et Evangelia in unum semper veniunt et in una gloria permanent*]. Even Peter, therefore, when he wanted to make "three tents" for them, is accused of ignorance as "one who did not know what he said." For there are not three tents for the Law, and the prophets, and the gospel, but there is one tent, which is the church of God.[60]

"Moses is *always* with Jesus," and the same holds true of Elijah and all the prophets. The Transfiguration is not their first encounter. It does not reveal that they now come together, whereas they had been separate before. They have always been one, and if anyone says otherwise, they are as foolish as Peter who wanted to build three individual tents.[61] There is a sense, then, in which the Transfiguration of Christ becomes a timeless event. Moses and Elijah, or rather all of the patriarchs and prophets, stand upon Mount Tabor at all times with the transfigured Lord in their midst. They do so because they are witnesses to Christ's presence in the Scriptures, and are themselves symbols of those Scriptures. The Transfiguration becomes more

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[59] Regarding the Transfiguration, Origen writes, "Straightaway there will appear to him who beholds Jesus in such form Moses,—the Law—and Elijah,—in the way of synecdoche, not one prophet only, but all the prophets—holding converse with Jesus" (*ComMt* 12.38).

[60] *HomLev* 6.2.5.

[61] For this reason, Origen also points out that, "According to Luke, 'Moses and Elijah appeared in glory'" (*ComMt* 12.38; see Lk 9:30–31), not only Christ. This demonstrates once more that the Law, the prophets, and the gospel are one, and are therefore glorified as one. See also *ComRom* 1.10.2–3.

than a historical reality. It becomes a perpetual noetic reality, and thus the truest of realities.

It is important to pause for a moment and note that, for Origen, the Transfiguration account is fundamentally, and above all else, an image of spiritual, or noetic interpretation of Scripture. It is the ultimate picture of what noetic exegesis entails, from the difficulty of the ascent to the reward of finally encountering the transfigured Word of God. We have already seen that Jesus personifies the gospels, that Moses personifies the Law, and that Elijah personifies the prophets. But that is not all. In the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen notes that Jesus was not transfigured in a valley, but on a mountain, and that, "We can further take the mountains, upon which the Word of God is said to leap and to be born more freely, as it were, as the New Testament, and may understand the hills, from which he sprang forth as one who had been long restrained and hidden, as the books of the Old Testament."[62] Elsewhere, as we saw in the previous chapter, he remarks that the bright, transfigured "garments of Jesus" are "the expressions and letters of the Gospels with which he invested himself."[63] Though the Transfiguration was a historical event, its importance does not rest purely upon its historicity. It is an image of scriptural interpretation for all peoples in all times: "But if you wish to see the Transfiguration of Jesus," Origen writes in his *Commentary on Matthew*, "behold with me the Jesus in the Gospels."[64] Each individual's path to Christ is the same path travelled by Moses, Elijah, and all the saints of old. Indeed, upon arrival, Origen

[62] *ComCt* 3.11.

[63] *ComMt* 12.38.

[64] Ibid., 12.37.

states that the reader will find not only Christ, but Moses and Elijah standing in glory as well: "Moses showed the face of the Law, Elijah the face of the prophets. Jesus himself was the Lord of the Law and the prophets. So, whoever understands the spiritual Law and 'the wisdom hidden in mystery' in the prophets sees Moses and Elijah in glory."[65] The spiritual interpretation of the Law and the prophets guides the reader up the mountain, allowing him/her to enter into the timeless moment of Christ's Transfiguration and to witness him standing there along with all his saints. For Origen, a result, anyone can enter into the Transfiguration narrative itself, becoming an active participant. By interpreting the text in a spiritual or noetic manner, the reader stands upon the very mountain about which he/she is reading.

Scriptural Intimacy with Christ

Occasionally, Origen will describe these scriptural encounters with Christ in romantic, or even sexual terms. This language ranges from the vocabulary of kissing, to intercourse, to conception, and even birth. The chief example is undoubtedly Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, a work considered by many scholars both ancient and modern to be one of his finest. Jerome himself remarks, "While Origen surpassed all writers in his other books, in his *Song of Songs* he surpassed himself."[66] Indeed, Jerome found Origen's work so overwhelming in theological and exegetical sophistication that he chose not to translate it, opting instead to translate

[65] *FragmLc* 140. There is a sense, too, in which Moses and the prophets actually become our guides up the mountain. Monika Pesty writes, "Donc, les prophètes ont commencé à expliquer les figures contenues dans l'Ancien Testament, puis, la venue du Christ a révélé le sens caché de l'Écriture, et maintenant c'est la tâche de l'exégète d'expliquer les figures, devenues compréhensibles avec la venue du Christ. Ainsi, les prophètes sont des instructeurs des exégètes en leur montrant par 'les pointillés d'argent' comment il faut interpréter les Écritures. C'est-à-dire, l'exégète doit devenir le disciple et l'imitateur des prophètes." Pesty, "Origène et les Prophètes," 415.

[66] *HomCt* prol.

the shorter and simpler *Homilies on the Song of Songs* ("I have passed over that work [the commentary], for it would require far too much time and labor and expense worthily to render into Latin such a mighty theme").[67] Ultimately, it would be Rufinus who would translate the *Commentary*, though not in its entirety. Whereas Jerome informs us that Origen's *Commentary* was comprised of ten books, Rufinus provides us with only three, a portion of the fourth, and Origen's lengthy prologue. As the original Greek *Commentary* has not survived, Rufinus' shortened Latin translation provides us with the best knowledge of what Origen wrote. Eusebius records that Origen composed these initial three books, covering *Song of Songs* 1:1–2:15, in Athens around the year 240, and completed the remaining books later on during his time in Caesarea.[68]

Whereas Origen is often criticized for inconsistency in his exegetical methodology, his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is unique in that it is consistent throughout, addressing the literal, the psychic, and the pneumatic senses for each passage. The first, or literal sense of the text is nothing more than the "simple record of events"[69] or the "simple story" described in the text and presented as a drama.[70] However, Origen is careful to note that the reader should not understand the literal sense carnally, writing, "Let no one think that she [the bride] loves anything belonging to the body or pertaining to the flesh, and let no stain be thought of in connection with her love."[71] Origen is troubled by the possibility that an

[67] Ibid.

[68] Eusebius, *EH* 6.32.

[69] *ComCt* 1.1.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., prol. 4.

inexperienced reader, unaware of the complexities of scriptural interpretation, might in fact be driven to lust through the very words of Scripture.[72] He therefore dwells primarily on the psychic and pneumatic senses. In the pneumatic sense, usually addressed second, the *Song of Songs* is a marriage-song about Christ and the church. In the psychic sense, typically addressed third, the text is concerned with the union of the individual soul and the Logos.

Origen is clear from the beginning that the main theme of the Song of Songs is love, and furthermore, that the text is an *epithalamium*, or marriage-song. This love, however, is specifically charity or affection, rather than a carnal love.[73] In light of this, the very nature of what we find in this *Commentary* differs from much of what Origen says elsewhere. His own language reflects the poetic intimacy of the text he is interpreting, and as a result, scriptural interpretation itself becomes an intimate act. From the beginning of Book One, the primary means by which the bride (as either church or soul) interacts with the Bridegroom is through the interpretation of Scripture. It opens with the plea of the bride: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth" (Sg 1:2). In the literal sense, Origen describes a bride who, having received a dowry from her bridegroom, longs to see him in person and to receive his kisses. She is no longer satisfied with the dowry alone. In the pneumatic sense, however, Origen identifies the dowry as nothing other than the Law and the utterances of the prophets, given by the angels and the prophets themselves. The church now longs for the direct appearance of Christ: "That he may now no longer speak to me only by His servants the angels and the prophets, but may come Himself,

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[72] Ibid., prol. 1.

[73] Ibid.

directly, and kiss me with the kisses of His mouth—that is to say, may pour the words of his mouth into mine, that I may hear him speak himself, and see him teaching."[74] Already, the reading and interpretation of Scripture is directly linked to the love that the bride and bridegroom share.

But the psychic sense takes the importance of scriptural exegesis even further. Here, the bride becomes the soul "whose only desire is to be united to the Word of God."[75] Again, the bridegroom has given a dowry, identified as "natural law and reason and free will," as well as the teaching of her masters.[76] Yet, once again, the dowry is not enough and only incites in the bride further longing for the Word of God. She cries out, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." Origen remarks, "The lighting up of every obscure meaning [*obscurus sensus*] is a kiss of the Word of God [*osculum Verbi Dei*] bestowed on the perfected soul."[77] That is, each time the spiritual sense of a scriptural text is revealed, the reader experiences the kiss of Christ. Or rather, it is *through* that kiss that the spiritual sense is unveiled:

> For as long as she was incapable of receiving the solid and unadulterated doctrine of the Word of God himself, of necessity she received 'kisses,' that is, interpretations, from the mouth of teachers. But, when she has begun to discern for herself what was obscure, to unravel what was tangled, to unfold what was involved, to interpret parables and riddles and the sayings of the wise along the lines of her own expert thinking, then let her believe that she has now received the kisses of the Spouse himself, that is, the Word of God.[78]

The path by which the bridegroom travels to his bride is, above all, exegetical. When the bride is given an interpretation by another, remaining a passive recipient, she also

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[74] Ibid., 1.1.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

passively receives another's "kisses." However, these kisses are not sufficient. As she reads the text spiritually, discerning the true meaning of its words for herself, the Word of God grasps her and kisses her, not once, but repeatedly. This emphasis on scriptural interpretation as an act of intimacy with Christ continues on throughout the remainder of the *Commentary*, demonstrating once more that for Origen, Scripture *is* Christ, and to read it is to know him.

This is shown in even more graphic terms in the *Homilies on Leviticus*, where Origen is commenting on the duties and qualities of the "great high priest." The high priest, we read, "shall not take a harlot and shall not contaminate his seed [*semen*] in his people."[79] But what, Origen asks, is this *semen*? "Comparing spiritual things with spiritual things," Origen looks to the words of Christ found in the Gospel of Mark: "The sower sows the Word" (Mk 4:14). Thus, he reasons, it is the Word of God (*verbum Dei*) which must not be contaminated, specifically by those who preach it in the churches. And if the word of God is the seed, or *semen*, of Christ the Great High Priest, the exegete must take extra care not to let it be contaminated by impure souls, or "harlot souls." Rather, this *semen* must be sown in "clean souls," virgin souls. Origen thus declares, "For the Apostle also says this: 'Until Christ be formed in us.' Therefore, the soul conceives from this seed of the word and the Word forms a fetus in it until it brings forth a spirit of the fear of God" (*Concipit ergo anima ex hoc verbi semine et conceptum format in se Verbum, donec pariat spiritum timoris Dei*).[80] These comments hold a wealth of remarkable content. Not only does Origen equate

[79] See Lv 21:10, 14.

[80] *HomLev* 12.7.2. Origen concludes this thought with the following: "For so the souls of the saints say through the prophet, 'By your fear, Lord, we conceived in the womb and brought forth in labor and gave birth; we have made the spirit of your salvation upon the earth.' This is the birth of the holy souls, this is conception; these are holy unions which are convenient and apt for the great high priest, Christ Jesus our Lord, 'to whom is glory and power forever and ever. Amen!'"

the word of God, or to be more precise, Scripture, with the seed of Christ, he essentially turns the reading of Scripture into a type of intercourse. With each reading, the interpreter receives the seed of Christ. In preaching the Scriptures, the exegete sows that seed in others. And, going further still, that seed is not sown in vain. It produces fruit. It produces a fetus (*conceptum*), and that fetus grows and matures into the fear of God.[81]

For Origen, the reading of Scripture is the most intimate encounter one can have with Christ. To read it spiritually is to kiss him. To receive it into one's soul is to receive his seed. It produces a child, which is the fear of God, and that child binds the reader to him forever. These passages, even if Origen is speaking in a figural or metaphorical sense, demonstrate just how intimate, just how personal scriptural interpretation is for him. It is much more than the reading of a text. It is much more than the acquisition of doctrines. Though it involves both, exegesis draws the enfleshed Christ inward. It unites him to the Christian, even as a husband is united to his wife.

The "Gospel" and the Unity of Scripture

Before the conclusion of this chapter, we must examine one further implication. The above holds significance not only for one's ability to encounter Christ, but also for the way in which one perceives Scripture itself. That is, it holds significance for the way in which one identifies and categorizes the Scriptures. We are used to speaking of genres like "gospel," "law," "prophetic books," "epistles," "apocalyptic

[81] See also *HomNum* 20.2.1, where Origen writes, "So as long as the soul clings to its spouse and listens to his word and embraces him, doubtless it receives from him the seed of the Word … And so it is a truly blessed offspring when the soul has had intercourse with the Word of God and when they have embraced one another."

literature," and so on. For Origen, however, these categories are not as straightforward. Indeed, the "coming" of Christ as a relative and individual phenomenon dramatically alters the apparent divisions within Scripture, drawing them together into a unified whole.

For example, Origen famously treats the term "gospel" at length in the prologue to his *Commentary on John*, where he describes it in three distinctive ways. In the broadest sense, it is "a discourse containing a report of things which, with good reason, make the hearer glad whenever he accepts what is reported, because they are beneficial" (Ἔστι τοίνυν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον λόγος περιέχων ἀπαγγελίαν πραγμάτων κατὰ τὸ εὔλογον διὰ τὸ ὠφελεῖν εὐφραινόντων τὸν ἀκούοντα, ἐπὰν παραδέξηται τὸ ἀπαγγελλόμενον).[82] In other words, it is "good news," to use the literal sense of the expression. Second, he notes that a gospel is a "discourse which contains the presence of a good for the believer, or a discourse which announces that an awaited good is present" (Ἢ εὐαγγέλιον ἐστι λόγος περιέχων ἀγαθοῦ τῷ πιστεύοντι παρουσίαν ἢ λόγος ἐπαγγελλόμενος παρεῖναι ἀγαθὸν τὸ προσδοχώμενον.).[83] Here, he narrows the definition, applying it specifically to believers and the *arrival* of an awaited good. This "good" is of course revealed to be Christ. Finally, he states that certain writings are "gospel" when they "present the sojourn [ἐπιδημία] of Christ and prepare for his coming [παρουσία] and produce it in the souls of those who are willing to receive the Word of God who stands at the door and knocks and wishes to enter their souls" (καὶ ἁπαξαπλῶς τὰ συνιστάντα τὴν Χριστοῦ ἐπιδημίαν καὶ κατασκευάζοντα τὴν παρουσίαν αὐτοῦ ἐμποιοῦντά τε αὐτὴν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν

[82] *ComJn* 1.27.

[83] Ibid.

βουλομένων παραδέξασθαι τὸν ἑστῶτα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούοντα καὶ εἰσελθεῖν βουλόμενον εἰς τὰς ψυχὰς λόγον θεοῦ.).[84] This definition is significantly narrower than the others, linking "gospel" specifically to the sojourn of Christ. Furthermore, that which is "gospel" not only records his historical sojourn, but produces it within the reader. We therefore find three different senses of the term, varying primarily in their degree of specificity.

Origen straightforwardly identifies the four traditional gospels as "gospel."[85] Each one teaches about the sojourn of Christ, bringing both "cheer" and "benefit" to those who hear them. They announce the arrival of an awaited good quite literally ("Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!").[86] But, what of the other scriptural writings? What of the Old Testament, or the various New Testament epistles? Here, the discussion becomes somewhat convoluted. Initially, Origen states, "the Old Testament is not gospel since it does not make known 'him who is to come,' but proclaims him in advance."[87] He also remarks, "everything written in the Epistles will not be gospel when it is compared with the narrative of the deeds, suffering and words of Jesus."[88] And yet, approaching the question with a broader framework, he states that the Law and the prophets might also be considered "gospel," because they are "believed to be discourses containing a report of things

[84] Ibid., 1.2.6. Origen actually cites this definition first, but I present it last for the sake of organization.

[85] However, in *ComJn* 1.21, he notes that the Gospel of John is the foremost gospel, or the "firstfruits" (ἀπαρχὴ) of the gospels.

[86] Jn 1:29.

[87] *ComJn* 1.17.

[88] Ibid., 1.20.

which, with good reason, make the hearers glad."[89] And furthermore, "all the New Testament is gospel" because it proclaims Christ and "contains various ascriptions of praise and teachings of him on account of whom the gospel is gospel."[90]

Certain commentators have chosen to embrace only half of what Origen says here, as though he patently rejects the possibility that the Old Testament could be considered gospel. Tzamalikos remarks that the term εὐαγγελιον is never applied to the Old Testament: "The announcements in the Old Testament, about the future advent of Christ, certainly were rejoicing news. However, the term εὐαγγελιον applies only to what contains the *realization* of these promises and announcements—and this is the New Testament."[91] These writings, he says, "*cannot* be called εὐαγγελιον."[92] Hanson too writes, "The Old Testament cannot be called the gospel because it does not point out him who is coming, but heralds him beforehand."[93]

Origen's treatment of εὐαγγελιον is admittedly perplexing, but Tzamalikos and Hanson are too quick in their assessments. Though Origen utilizes different definitions of "gospel" at different times, leading to an array of diverse conclusions, he makes an additional statement that ultimately serves to illuminate the rest. The Old Testament is not "gospel" in an obvious sense, but in his own words:

> One might reply to this, however, that before the coming of Christ, the Law and the prophets did not contain the proclamation which belongs to the definition of the gospel since he who explained the mysteries in them had not

[89] Ibid., 1.32. Regarding Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, Origen adds later, "Now how does he preach Jesus, beginning from the prophet, unless Isaiah was some part of the beginning of the gospel?" (*ComJn* 1.85).

[90] Ibid., 1.17.

[91] Tzamalikos, *The Concept of Time in Origen*, 280.

[92] Ibid.; emphasis mine.

[93] Hanson, *Allegory & Event*, 210.

> yet come. But since the Savior has come, and has caused the gospel to be embodied in the gospel, *he has made all things gospel*, as it were [πάντα ὡσεὶ εὐαγγέλιον πεποίηκεν].[94]

This statement gets to the heart of the issue. In the coming of Christ, the Law, the prophets, and the epistles *become* gospel*,* along with everything else. This includes the whole of the Old Testament, now read in the light of Christ's coming. We ought not, therefore, maintain that the Old Testament "cannot be called εὐαγγελιον." Read rightly, the Old Testament does contain good news, it does contain "the presence of a good," and above all, it does prepare each individual for the sojourn of Christ, producing it in "the souls of those who are willing to receive the Word of God." In the coming of Christ, all is revealed and transformed. Furthermore, Origen has already made clear in this very same prologue that the "coming" of Christ is a noetic, individualized event. For those who recognize Christ in the law, such as Moses, the law is already Gospel. He need not wait until a specific historical event.

Elsewhere, Origen does something comparable with his understanding of the "New" and "Old" Testaments. For the one who reads the Old Testament at the level of the letter, as a plain historical account, the Old Testament is precisely that: "old." Indeed, there is nothing "new" about it. But for the one who reads it in a noetic manner, it proclaims Christ just as fully as the gospels themselves. The old becomes new.[95] Thus, in the *Homilies on Numbers*, he remarks, "I do not even give the name

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[94] *ComJn* 1.33; emphasis mine.

[95] In the course of his work, Origen often stops to correct the theology of figures like Marcion, Valentinus, or Basilides. In *HomNum* 9.4.1, he notes that these individuals have created a dichotomy between the God of the Law, who is just, and the God of the gospels, who is good. He notes the way in which Moses and Aaron demonstrate love for their enemies in the book of Numbers, which is precisely what Christ commands in the gospels. Thus, he argues, "the power of the gospel is found in the Law," and the gospels are "supported by the foundation of the Law."

'Old Testament' to the Law, if I understand it spiritually."[96] His reasoning is as follows:

> The Law becomes an "Old Testament" only for those who want to understand it in a fleshly way; and for them it has necessarily become old and aged, because it cannot maintain its strength. But for us, who understand and explain it spiritually and according to the gospel-meaning, it is always new. Indeed, both are "New Testaments" for us, not by the age of time but by the newness of understanding [*intelligentia*].[97]

Following this, Origen goes on to invert the terms, just as he did in his discussion of Christ's noetic coming. Not only does the Old Testament become new for the one who reads it spiritually, but the New Testament can also become old: "For the sinner and for the one who does not preserve the covenant of love, even the Gospels grow old. Nor can it be a 'New Testament' for the one who does not 'lay aside the old man and put on the new man and the one created according to God.'"[98] We therefore see an overt parallel here between the noetic coming of Christ and the noetic interpretation of Scripture. For the patriarchs and prophets, the Old Testament is nothing less than gospel, and in that gospel, they encounter Christ himself. Conversely, many who read the New Testament even now will find nothing but the old, and Christ still has yet to come to them.[99] These two issues are inextricably bound up together. Origen does not, and never did, perceive them as distinctive phenomena.[100]

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[96] *HomNum* 9.4.1.

[97] Ibid., 9.4.2.

[98] Ibid.

[99] See also *HomLev* 7.5.5, where Origen writes, "For even in the Gospels, it is 'the letter' that 'kills.' Not only in the OT is 'the letter that kills' found; there is also in the New Testament 'the letter that kills' that one who does not spiritually perceive what is said."

[100] I am thus in agreement with K. Torjesen's criticism of de Lubac: "His claim that the exegetical movement from letter to spirit is nothing other than a reading of the New Testament

Ultimately, for Origen, the one who reads Scripture rightly will come to see that it is not really made up of "many books," or "many words" at all, but of a "single word." In the fifth book of the *Commentary on John*, he quotes Ecclesiastes, "My Son, beware of making many books," (Eccl 12:12) as well as Proverbs, "In a multitude of words you will not escape sin, but you will be wise if you restrain your lips" (Prv 10:19). The biblical authors themselves appear guilty of such things, but as Origen notes, there is a difference between speaking many words that conflict, and many words that are united:

> Consequently, according to this understanding, we could say that he who utters anything hostile to religion is loquacious, but he who speaks the things of truth, even if he says everything so as to leave out nothing, always speaks the one Word. The saints are not loquacious since they cling to the goal which accords with the one Word. If, then, a multitude of words is recognized on the basis of the teachings, and not on the basis of the recital of many words, see if we can thus say that all the sacred works are one book, but those outside the sacred are many.[101]

In this particular context, Origen is responding by name to Marcion, not only because of the division he creates between the Old Testament and the New, but also because Origen alleges that Marcion and his followers misunderstand the words of Paul: "According to my gospel in Christ Jesus" (Rom 2:16). Whereas they take this to mean that there is only one gospel text, rather than four, Origen argues that "the gospel recorded by the many is one in power, and there is truly one gospel through

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meaning into the Old Testament is not convincing." *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 7. However, I must disagree with her when she writes that for Origen, "the Gospel differs from the Old Testament in that Christ proclaims himself without intermediaries in the Gospel" (ibid., 67), and "In the Incarnation the Logos speaks with his own voice. In Scripture he speaks through the mouth of the prophets and saints" (ibid., 111). Origen states time and time again that standing right in front of the bodily Christ, the incarnate Logos, would not guarantee recognition of his identity or divinity. On the other hand, the patriarchs and prophets (as well as figures like Aaron the high priest) encountered the Logos *directly*, precisely because they knew the true meaning of their own words. Indeed, Scripture (whether as Old Testament or New) *is itself* the incarnate Logos, and reading it rightly means encountering Christ, "without intermediaries." I will address this point further in the conclusion of this thesis.

[101] *ComJn* 5.5.

the four."[102] They all teach a single truth, or rather, *he who is the truth*. Indeed, the "single word" Origen is referring to is none other than Christ, the Word of God: "The complete Word of God which was in the beginning with God is not a multitude of Words [πολυλογία], for it is not words [λόγοι]. It is a single Word consisting of several ideas, each of which is a part of the whole Word [ὅλος λόγος]."[103] Again, we find that for Origen, Scripture *is* Christ.[104]

Implications

In commenting on the various *epinoiai* in the Johannine Prologue, Origen writes: "Let no one censure us because he thinks we are describing these things in reference to time. The logical order demands a first, second, and following, even if no time [χρόνος] be found when the things put forward by the argument as third and fourth did not exist at all."[105] This same principle can be applied to the points we have covered in the course of this chapter. Origen does not feel bound by the historical fact that Christ came after Moses, or that the New Testament follows the Old. These are points of little theological value, because Christ can genuinely come to any person, at any time, in any place.[106] The reader can also come to him, and witness his Transfiguration. The Old Testament can be New, and the New can be Old.

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[102] Ibid., 5.7.

[103] Ibid., 5.5.

[104] See *ComRom* 1.14.1: "Because Christ is called the power of God and the gospel also is called the power of God, the following ought to be considered: whether Christ, as he is many other things, ought to be understood as the gospel. Indeed, perhaps what is called the 'eternal gospel' should be interpreted with reference to him."

[105] Ibid., 2.131.

[106] Thus, when Origen writes, "For always in the Scriptures the Logos became flesh that he might dwell among us" (*Philoc* 15.19), the "always" (ἀεὶ) is crucial.

Chronology, to put it plainly, is of little consequence.[107]

This plays out in a stunning variety of ways, beyond what we have already witnessed. In *Contra Celsus*, for example, Origen declares that "the perfect man, who is always engaged in the words, works, and thoughts of the divine Logos," can continuously live *in* the Lord's Day, *in* the Day of Preparation, *in* Passover, and *in* Pentecost. These days become not mere "holy days," but realities that each individual can live at all times. This "perfect man," writes Origen, "is always living in [the Lord's] days."[108] Origen will also speak as though any individual from any time can enter into the events of Christ's life. We saw this with the Transfiguration, but it holds true also for the crucifixion and resurrection:

> For does not the one who sins now, after his illumination and God's other benefits to him, crucify the Son of God again by his own sins to which he has returned, although he does nothing that in the common literal use of the language could be said to be a crucifixion of the Son of God? And did this not also happen earlier, and did not he who sinned after he had heard divine words crucify the Son of God in advance? … But consider if the saying, "I have been crucified with Christ" can be applied not only to the saints after his coming, but also to those previous saints, so that we may not say that the saints after his coming surpass Moses and the patriarchs. And let the statement, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," be made not only by those after his coming, but also by those who preceded it … [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] too were buried with Christ and arose with him, but by no means at the time of Jesus' physical burial or his physical resurrection."[109]

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[107] Thus, even regarding one of the most well-known scriptural references to Christ's own chronological progression, where Luke writes that Christ "increased in wisdom and in stature" (Lk 2:52), Origen remarks, "And let it not surprise you, seeing that our Lord and Savior is one and the same, that we should speak of him first as a beginner, in Proverbs; then as advancing, in Ecclesiastes; and lastly as more perfect in the Song of Songs, when you see the same things written in the Gospels where he is said, for us and among us, to advance. Jesus advanced, it is written, in age and wisdom with God and men" (*ComCt* prol. 4). Origen perceives Christ himself to be "progressing" through the books of Scripture, or rather *as* the books of Scripture.

[108] *CCels* 8.22. See also *HomJd* 1.1: "For if we comprehend 'the true light that enlightens every man coming into this world' and we offer our souls to it in order to be enlightened, or if 'the sun of justice' rises up within us and 'illuminates the world' of our soul, then we also possess the 'days of Jesus' Christ, the days of salvation."

[109] *ComJn* 20.91–93.

The patriarchs and prophets, too, crucified the Son of God by sinning even after they had "heard divine words." They also entered *into* that crucifixion, as well as into Christ's burial and resurrection.[110] For Origen, to put it plainly, nothing that can be said of contemporary Christians cannot also be said of the Old Testament saints.[111] They are "one flock and one shepherd."[112]

Consequentially, then, no individual is at a disadvantage because of the time period in which he/she lives. It is simply not the case that the disciples profited from their historical situation. Neither did anyone else who physically witnessed Jesus in first-century Palestine. As Origen frequently points out, most who saw him in the flesh did not recognize him at all. Individuals like Moses, however, fully participated in the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ prior to the actualization of those events.[113] Truly, Christ came to Moses. Truly, Moses beheld the transfigured Christ.

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[110] In this passage, it becomes more apparent that much of what Origen says of time and chronology is, at least in part, rooted in Pauline theology. When Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and no longer live" (Gal 2:20), or that the Christian has been "buried with him" and "raised with him" (see Col 2:12), he quite intentionally bends our perception of reality, if not time. For Paul, the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection one enters into are nothing less than real. Origen follows Paul on this point, though expands upon it considerably.

[111] Similarly, just as the Old Testament saints were capable of crucifying Christ prior to his crucifixion, so also Christians today are capable of "participating" in the ancient sacrificial system, offering up bulls, sheep, goats, and birds: "Seek these offerings within yourself and you will find them within your soul. Understand that you have within yourself herds of bulls, those that were blessed in Abraham. Understand that you have herds of sheep and herds of she-goats in which the patriarchs were blessed and multiple. Understand also that within you are the birds of the sky" (*HomLev* 5.2.3). Though Origen gives no indication here that these sacrifices are somehow "noetic" realities, this selection still serves to illustrate the way in which Origen reads the Scriptures: not as historical records, but as something to enter into and experience firsthand.

[112] *HomJos* 26.3.

[113] David Dawson points out that Origen introduces two meanings for the term "revealed." In *ComJn* 6.26, Origen writes, "A thing is revealed in one way when it is understood; in another way, when it is a prophecy that has occurred and been fulfilled—for it is revealed when its fulfillment is completed." Dawson thus argues that Origen contrasts the prophets and apostles on the basis of this distinction: "The content of revelation can be received as a form of knowledge (as an unveiling of what had been covered), and this is what the prophets receive. In contrast, revelation 'in the promise of Christ' can be received only as a consequence of 'the appearance' of Christ (as the fulfillment or occurrence of what has been promised), and this is what the apostles have witnessed." Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 131. Though Dawson is right to point out that Origen makes this

Truly, in the noetic reading of Scripture, Moses saw *everything* that the disciples saw. For Origen, the same would apply now. Even though the historical life of Christ has long passed, each Christian can witness, experience, and participate in that life.

In conclusion, we must agree with the assessment of Rowan Greer who writes, "Indeed, Origen virtually identifies the spiritual life with the interpretation of Scripture, since to begin to penetrate the deeper meaning of the sacred text is to participate so far as possible in the ultimate realities that mark the Christian's destiny."[114] The interpretation of Scripture, for Origen, is not a mere exercise or discipline. It is not merely the process by which one acquires proper doctrine, or a way for God to speak. It is, to restate it once more, an encounter with the enfleshed person of Jesus Christ. Because the whole of the Christian life is grounded in one's knowledge and experience of this very person, the whole of the Christian life must also be grounded in the reading and interpretation of this living, ancient text, which is itself Christ.

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distinction, and often uses it, we must not neglect to read the *whole* of what Origen says. Yes, there is a certain revelation that occurs only as a result of "the appearance" of Christ, but to state it once more, the appearance of Christ is not limited to his historical, bodily coming. His appearance is a noetic reality, and the patriarchs and prophets experienced it in full.

[114] Greer and Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 180. Commenting on Greer's statement, Elizabeth Dively Lauro writes that perhaps "Origen views the believer's interaction with Scripture not only to lead to the spiritual life but also to be identical with it. Greer arguably suggests that, for Origen, Scripture defines and facilitates the Christian spiritual life, opening this life up to the advancing believer, and indeed unfolding into that life itself." *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture*, 32.

CHAPTER FIVE

"EAT MY FLESH AND DRINK MY BLOOD": THE SCRIPTURAL CONSUMPTION OF CHRIST

> And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.
>
> Ezekiel 3:1–3

Why place a chapter on the scriptural consumption of Christ at the end of this study, rather than at the beginning? We have seen it argued in the Introduction that if Christ is the very content of the Scriptures, then the reading and interpretation of those Scriptures is a sacramental act for Origen, and more specifically, that it is *modeled* on his theology of the Eucharist. As Dively Lauro puts it, "Origen uses consumption of Christ in Eucharist as a basis for discussing consumption of Christ in Scripture."[1] Similarly, Richard Smith remarks that there is "a certain priority given to the Eucharist because Origen can assume an appreciation for the Eucharistic liturgy among his hearers when he wants to make a point about Scripture. It is the Eucharist that clarifies Scripture."[2] In other words, to borrow the words of Hans Boersma, "We can only appreciate how Origen's exegesis functions if and when we can come to

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[1] E. Dively Lauro, "The Eschatological Significance of Scripture," 84.

[2] R. G. Smith, "The Sacramental Word," 130. Later, Smith adds, "Although a certain priority may often be given to the scriptural side of the Scripture / Eucharist relationship in Origen, his understanding of the Eucharist has significant implications in his reading and preaching of sacred Scripture." Ibid., 108. There is a sense in which both of these statements are accurate. I will argue that Origen heavily prioritizes the Scriptures, but he will occasionally use the Eucharist as a point of reference for the sake of his audience. It is notable that when he does so, it is almost always in the context of a spoken homily.

understand the sacramental structure that lies at the basis of his interpretation."[3] From time to time, Origen does explicitly link the two, as in the *Homilies on Leviticus*, where he builds on the warning of 1 Cor 11:27: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." Origen asks, "How much more will we say this rightly and suitably about the word of God? This word is not for all … but it is only for the saints who are purified in mind."[4] Similarly, in the *Homilies on Exodus*, he writes:

> You who are accustomed to take part in divine mysteries know, when you receive the body of the Lord, how you protect it with all caution and veneration lest any small part fall from it … But if you are so careful to preserve his body, and rightly so, how do you think that there is less guilt to have neglected God's word than to have neglected his body?[5]

No doubt, passages like these lend weight to the claims above.

Why, then, leave this chapter until now? Despite the fact that Origen draws theologically significant parallels between the Eucharist and the Scriptures, I will demonstrate in the course of this chapter that the latter is not actually *based* upon the former in any theologically significant way. If anything, it is the other way around. This claim is rooted in three basic propositions: first, it is difficult, if not impossible, to start with Origen's "Eucharistic theology," because there is little scholarly consensus about what such a theology entails. Indeed, most attempts have sought only to determine whether or not Origen would have affirmed the doctrine of the

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[3] H. Boersma, "Joshua as Sacrament," 24.

[4] *HomLev* 13.5.5–6.1.1.

[5] *HomEx* 13.3.

Real Presence (with much disagreement).[6] Second, in *ComJn* 32.310–11, Origen's teaching on the consumption of Christ actually serves to flip the "traditional" methodology on its head, explicitly prioritizing the reading of Scripture *over* the Eucharist. And third, in most discussions about the consumption of Christ, Origen neglects even to mention the Eucharist, instead rooting his remarks in the spiritual interpretation of the passover laws (Ex 12:1–27), the "Bread of Life Discourse" (Jn 6:22–59), and the image of Christ as the true "paschal lamb" (see 1 Cor 5:7).

Ultimately, as we shall see, Origen understands the consumption of Christ to be much more about hermeneutics than about sacraments.[7] By giving extended attention to the themes of priesthood, passover, and sacrifice, particularly in the *Commentary on John* and *On Pascha*, we will find that Origen perceives the *recognition* of Christ in the Scriptures to be the most fundamental means of consuming his flesh and blood. Furthermore, this hermeneutical consumption is the apex of everything we have surveyed thus far, and for Origen, the most intimate means of encountering the incarnate Word of God.

Defining Origen's Eucharistic Theology

In the late nineteenth century, and most of the twentieth, discussions of Origen's Eucharistic theology tended to focus on whether or not Origen's work could be made to support the doctrine of the Real Presence, or occasionally of

[6] Indeed, in the introduction to his anthology of Origen's work, Hans Urs von Balthasar explains why he has chosen to leave out Origen's teaching on the sacraments: "Everyone familiar with the period knows how difficult it is … to separate out his doctrine of the Eucharist in its (unquestionably present) realism from his so-called allegorization as spiritual Word-communion." *Spirit and Fire*, 15.

[7] This is not to say that scriptural interpretation is *not* "sacramental" for Origen, but only that he does not *base* his understanding of scriptural consumption upon his understanding of the Eucharist, or any of the traditional sacraments.

Transubstantiation specifically. The interpretations varied dramatically, and for good reason. However anachronistic the terms themselves might be, it is true that Origen's understanding of the Eucharist is notoriously vague, lending itself to a number of differing positions.

In his 1886 Bampton lectures, for example, Charles Bigg argued that Origen (and the Alexandrian theologians in general) held to "a real but spiritual and in no sense material presence of Christ in the Eucharist."[8] However, Bigg's work begins not with a close examination of all the available evidence, but with the basic assumption that Origen is a Platonist. He then uses that Platonism as a lens by which to interpret the whole of Origen's Eucharistic theology. So, by his account, Origen simply cannot accept the doctrine of Transubstantiation because that doctrine rests upon Aristotelian or Stoic Realism, which is "diametrically opposed to Platonism."[9] Rather, Origen believes in a "spiritual presence," because for the Platonist, a "Corporeal Presence" would be a *lesser* presence, "belonging to the lower life."[10] In his own words, "There is a presence of Christ, but it is a spiritual, and therefore in Origen's view the only real, presence, real precisely because in nowise material."[11] For Origen, he alleges, the bread and the wine are merely an allegory, or a symbol, meant to direct the participant to the immaterial Word of God. Bigg finds his support in a well-known passage from the *Series of Commentaries on Matthew*:

> For God the Word was not saying that the visible bread which he was holding in his hands was his body, but rather the Word [*verbum*], in whose mystery the bread was to be broken. He was not saying that the visible drink was his

[8] C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 265, n.1.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 267.

> blood, but the Word [*verbum*], in whose mystery the drink was to be poured out. For what else could the body and the blood of God the Word be except the Word which nourishes and the Word which 'makes glad the heart.'[12]

In stating that it is *not* the bread and the wine that are designated the body and blood, but rather "the Word in a mystery," Origen appears to take a symbolist position.

On the other hand, certain passages do not fit so neatly into Bigg's reading. In *Contra Celsus*, for example, Origen states, "But we give thanks to the Creator of the universe and eat the loaves that are presented with thanksgiving and prayer over the gifts, so that by the prayer they become a certain holy body which sanctifies those who partake of it with a pure intention."[13] Through prayer, the loaves *become* (γενομένους) a certain holy body. De Lubac thus comments, "It is easy to see that when Origen speaks of the Eucharist as a 'typological and symbolic' (τυπικὸν καὶ συμβολικόν) body, he is not denying for all that the reality of that body." Rather, "he means here quite simply that the Body received in the Eucharist is still symbolic with respect to other more direct and more spiritual manifestations of the Logos or, rather, with respect to the Logos himself."[14] That is, Origen would very much affirm the doctrine of the Real Presence, though there are for him more direct and profound ways in which to encounter the Word. For de Lubac, attributing a symbolist view to Origen, at least without serious qualification, is both problematic and anachronistic.

Daniélou, writing not long after de Lubac, forms a kind of synthesis by

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[12] *SerMt* 85; see Ps 103:5. Trans. Daniel Sheerin, *The Eucharist*, 188. *[N]on enim* panem *illum visibilem quem tenebat in manibus* corpus *suum dicebat deus verbum, sed verbum in cuius mysterio fuerat panis ille frangendus. [N]ec potum illum visibilem* sanguinem *suum dicebat, sed verbum in cuius mysterio potus ille fuerat effundendus. [N]am* corpus *dei verbi aut* sanguis *quid aliud potest esse, nisi verbum quod nutrit, et verbum quod 'laetificat cor'?* GCS *Origenes* XI 196-7. Bigg will also cite *ComJn* 32.310 in support, discussed below.

[13] *CCels* 8.33.

[14] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 413–14.

affirming elements of both positions. Like Bigg, he notes that Origen's "Platonist turn of mind" is manifestly evident in this discussion, and that "spiritual eating is plainly asserted to be superior to material."[15] Like de Lubac, however, he argues that Origen "by no means denied the reality of the Eucharist."[16] Rather, he simply minimizes the importance of that reality in order to prioritize the spiritual consumption of the Word, experienced most directly through the reading of Scripture. In a sense, then, Daniélou agrees with de Lubac, though he more strongly echoes Bigg's assertion that Origen intentionally disparages the material elements of the Eucharist as a result of his overt Platonism.[17]

Still, despite this synthesis, the work of Daniélou and many others have failed to produce a scholarly consensus. Nearly thirty years later, Joseph Trigg wrote of Origen's "disdain" for the material bread and wine, and argued that Origen "strongly upheld the symbolist position."[18] A mere two years after that, Crouzel asserted just the opposite, arguing that Origen affirms "clearly the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements,"[19] though with many of the same caveats mentioned by earlier scholars.

What, then, does Origen's Eucharistic theology entail? Without a true consensus, it is unhelpful to use that theology as a basis for his understanding of

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[15] Jean Daniélou, *Origen*, trans. Walter Mitchell (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 62, 65.

[16] Ibid., 62.

[17] Daniélou also demonstrates how this discussion has been divided along confessional lines, particularly among Catholics and Protestants. On this, see *Origen*, 61–62.

[18] Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 194–95. Trigg essentially restates the position of Bigg: "For him as a Platonist, the Eucharist was incomparably more real as a symbol than it could be if there were a material transformation since the intelligible world is far more real than the material." Ibid., 195.

[19] Crouzel, *Origen*, 226.

scriptural consumption. The only common thread running through the manifold theories is that, to one degree or another, Origen places less emphasis on the material bread and wine than on the spiritual encounter one is meant to have with the Word.[20] But does this really help us? There are of course certain real and important parallels between the two in Origen's thought. They are both the body of Christ, and both require supreme reverence. Both are experienced within the context of the church, and both bring about a profound encounter with the Word.[21] Both are consumed in the present, and both will be consumed in the eternal heavenly banquet.[22] The similarities themselves are more than worthy of extended study. However, they do not necessarily advance our understanding of *how* the Christian is meant to consume the body and blood of Christ through a reading of the text.[23] It is a stubborn fact that

[20] Most recently, Elizabeth Dively Lauro has stated that "Origen recognizes the material presence of Christ in Eucharist and views it as significant to the extent that it points the reader ultimately to the spiritual presence of Christ therein." Dively Lauro, "Eschatological Significance," 85, n.4. If there is anything close to a majority position, this is probably it, as de Lubac, Daniélou, and Crouzel have each made similar remarks.

[21] The ecclesial context of both Eucharist and the public reading of Scripture is particularly important. De Lubac notes, "The life of the church has its source in Scripture. It has it no less in the Eucharist. Scripture and Eucharist, moreover, appear closely associated in everything, since it is in the midst of the same assembly, in the course of the same liturgy, that the Bread of the Word is broken and the body of Christ is distributed. Both are the object of the same veneration … It is not possible for Scripture and the Eucharist not to be made, so to speak, from the same material and not to constitute at bottom the same Mystery, since in both of them, it is the same Logos of God who comes to us and lifts us up to him." *History and Spirit*, 407.

[22] See *SerMt* 85–86; *HomLev* 13.6.2. See especially Dively Lauro, "Eschatological Significance," 95–102.

[23] In fact, utilizing Origen's Eucharistic theology as a starting point for this discussion can actually serve to obfuscate his intended meaning. For example, Daniel Shin writes, "Origen develops his understanding of the Real Presence of the Logos in Scripture in other writings as well. One of his favorite metaphors in describing the Real Presence of the Logos in Scripture is incarnation." "Some Light from Origen: Scripture as Sacrament", 406. Shin, taking the position that Origen is a proponent of the doctrine of the Real Presence, transfers that same doctrine to the Scriptures and ends up concluding that Origen's references to a scriptural "incarnation" are mere asides, or metaphorical curiosities. But, if we begin instead with Origen's very explicit belief that the Logos of God is indeed incarnate in the text, his belief or lack thereof in the Real Presence becomes a non-issue, and we can focus on how it is that the Christian is actually meant to consume the flesh and blood of Christ in the text. See D. Shin, "Some Light from Origen," 399–425.

when Origen wishes to discuss that type of consumption, he does not look to the Eucharist for guidance. In fact, between the two, he appears to view scriptural interpretation as the more fundamental act of consumption.

The Last Supper in the *Commentary on John*

In Book Thirty-Two of the *Commentary on John*, Origen's teaching on the Last Supper serves to turn the "traditional" methodology on its head. Commenting on Judas' approaching betrayal and the "entrance" of Satan (Jn 13:27), Origen draws a connection to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians: "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself."[24] This, Origen proposes, is precisely what happens to Judas, which is why Satan enters him only "after the morsel." And yet, Origen pauses the narrative commentary to add the following explanatory remark:

> Let the simple [ἁπλούστεροι] understand the bread and the cup according to the more common interpretation concerning the Eucharist, but let those who have learned to hear in a deeper way understand them in accordance with the promise that is more excellent and concerns the nourishing word of truth [ὁ τρόφιμος τῆς ἀληθείας λόγος] … Wherefore, frequently, when the true word [λόγος ἀληθὴς] is given to a soul that is sick and is not in need of such food, it afflicts that soul, and causes its condition to worsen. Consequently, it is dangerous to speak even the truth.[25]

Remarkably, the "bread and the cup," even in the context of the Last Supper narrative, is only related to the Eucharist in a superficial or "simple" way. The truest way in which to understand them is to understand them within the context of the "nourishing word of truth" (ὁ τρόφιμος τῆς ἀληθείας λόγος), a plain reference to the

[24] 1 Cor 11:29.

[25] *ComJn* 32.310-311; Νοείσθω δὲ ὁ ἄρτος καὶ τὸ ποτήριον τοῖς μὲν ἁπλουστέροις κατὰ τὴν κοινοτέραν περὶ τῆς εὐχαριστίας ἐκδοχήν, τοῖς δὲ βαθύτερον ἀκούειν μεμαθηκόσιν κατὰ τὴν θειοτέραν καὶ περὶ τοῦ τροφίμου τῆς ἀληθείας λόγου ἐπαγγελίαν … Διὸ πολλάκις λόγος ἀληθὴς ψυχῇ νοσούσῃ οὐ δεομένῃ τοιαύτης τροφῆς διδόμενος ἐπιτρίβει αὐτὴν καὶ πρόφασις αὐτῇ χειρόνων γίνεται· καὶ οὕτως καὶ τὰ ἀληθῆ λέγειν κινδυνῶδές ἐστι.

Scriptures. The implications are numerous. First, this suggests that Scripture and Eucharist are not two equally significant manifestations of the one Word of God. Plainly put, Origen gives priority to the Scriptures, even in the context of a passage where one would expect the very opposite. Second, as a result of that priority, Origen's understanding of the Scriptures (whether as a sacrament or otherwise) is actually *unlikely* to be modeled on his understanding of the Eucharist, contrary to the common assumption. Finally, at least in this setting, Origen indicates that the literal sense of the Last Supper account correlates to the Eucharist, whereas the spiritual sense correlates to the Scriptures, throwing into question even the notion that the two are directly parallel to one another. A hierarchical model emerges instead. Though the Eucharist itself is both material and spiritual, it simultaneously serves as the material counterpoint to the more spiritual act of scriptural interpretation. De Lubac sheds considerable light on this point:

> Scripture and Eucharist are thereby joined once again. Both never cease to "build up" the church. But the comparison ends as a hierarchy. Therein lies the Origenian paradox. Is it not obvious for us that in the Eucharist we have the Lord himself, while in Scripture we still have only his Word? Yet, taking the matter from another perspective, the paradox is clarified. For, on the one hand, the "Body," as real as it may be, is not the Divinity itself; as its name indicates, it always remains the symbol of some more spiritual reality, while, on the other hand, the "Word" is, in its pure essence, that very reality: for the Son of God, God himself, is "Word."[26]

Of course, Scripture also has (or is) a material "body," and as we have seen many times, reading it does not guarantee recognition of its divinity. De Lubac fails to emphasize that point here, but he is right in his general assessment. For Origen, Scripture is a more direct way of encountering the Word. It is itself "Word." It is accessible at all times, to all people if they so desire. We will see this concept played

[26] De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 418.

out more fully when we come to Origen's discussion of personal priesthood in the *Commentary on John*. But de Lubac does go on to note that "the very flesh of the Logos is thus spirit, and the manducation of it is wholly spiritual."[27] This, too, is part of the paradox. That which is most spiritual is simultaneously that which gives him his truest "flesh," a blatantly non-spiritual term.

Origen's explanation of the "bread and the cup" is not something he explicitly repeats in his other written works. It is difficult to know if it should be applied systematically, or if he is even laying down a fixed hierarchy. But without disparaging the Eucharist, he seems always to prioritize the reading of Scripture. That alone should cause us to look elsewhere.

Scriptural Foundations

If the Eucharist is not the appropriate starting place, what is? The answer is Scripture itself. Three primary texts, of varying length, form the backbone of this discussion: the passover laws of Ex 12:1–27, the Bread of Life Discourse in Jn 6:22–59, and Paul's identification of Christ as the true passover lamb in 1 Cor 5:7. In what follows, we will see how these three passages relate to one another in Origen's work, and how they collectively communicate something about the scriptural consumption of Christ.

Origen's usual starting place is the Bread of Life Discourse, where Jesus most explicitly tells his disciples that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. While in the synagogue at Capernaum, so the account goes, Jesus provocatively identifies himself as "the living bread which came down from heaven,"[28] a reference to the

[27] Ibid., 419.

[28] Jn 6:51.

miraculous manna the Israelites consumed while wandering in the desert. However, he fuels the intrigue further by adding the following: "and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."[29] The Gospel writer notes how this statement puzzles the Jews who were present, leading them to ask one another, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"[30] Jesus' reply is well known:

> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.[31]

Many readers, both ancient and modern, tend automatically to pair this passage with the Last Supper, and for good reason. Jesus explicitly refers to the consumption of his flesh and blood in both instances. But Origen, while surely not ignorant of the connection, sees the Bread of Life discourse as relating more fundamentally to the spiritual fulfillment of the passover, and ultimately to the consumption of Christ through the Scriptures. He will insist that the very purpose for which Jesus spoke these words was to reinterpret that event:

> To show that the passover is something spiritual [noetic] and not this sensible passover, he himself says: "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you." Are we then to eat his flesh and drink his blood in a physical manner? But if this is said spiritually [noetically], then the passover is spiritual [noetic], not physical.[32]

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Jn 6:52.

[31] Jn 6:53–56.

[32] *PPasch* 13.23–35; Καὶ ὅτι νοητόν ἐστι τὸ πάσχα καὶ οὐ τοῦτο τὸ αἰσθητόν, αὐτὸς λέγει· «Ἐὰν μὴ φάγητέ μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίητέ μου τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς». Ὀφείλομεν ἄρα κατὰ τὸ αἰσθητὸν τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ τρώγειν καὶ τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ πίνειν; Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο νοητῶς λέγει, ἄρα νοητὸν καὶ οὐκ αἰσθητόν ἐστι τὸ πάσχα.

For "those who have ears," Jesus' statement carries with it the revelation that he himself is the true paschal lamb. As a result, those capable are meant to see that the whole of the passover must be understood in light of the one who stands before them and speaks.

This may strike us as unusual, but in this discourse, it is Jesus himself who firsts guides the reader back to the Exodus event by referring repeatedly to Moses, the desert wanderings, and the manna from heaven. Origen simply reads the whole discourse in that same light. When are the Israelites commanded to eat "flesh" in the context of the Exodus? In the passover laws, with relation to the passover lamb: "They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted."[33] Surely, argues Origen, Jesus is the fulfillment of both manna *and* meat. Still, as if to dispel any lingering doubt, he will also claim apostolic support for this interpretation by citing the proclamation of Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed."[34] If Paul himself has not missed the typological connection, neither must we. These three texts therefore form the basis for Origen's belief that Christ is the true paschal lamb, and that each Christian must noetically participate in the consumption of his flesh and blood. Only one question remains: how is this to be done?

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to answering that question through a close examination of two of Origen's most crucial works: the *Commentary on John* and *On Pascha*, both of which give extended attention to the theme of passover. By going through Origen's interpretation of the passover commands in each text, point-

[33] Ex 12:8.

[34] 1 Cor 5:7.

by-point, we will discover that Origen views the recognition of Christ in the Scriptures to be not only a priestly act, but also to be the most fundamental means of consumption. We will also come to understand how that recognition and consumption takes place. Though the two texts overlap considerably in content, the comparison will allow us to observe Origen's theology change and develop over time. It will also provide us with a more holistic understanding of this subject as he discusses the same themes in differing ways. As the *Commentary on John* is the earlier of the two, we will begin there.

The *Commentary on John*

Priesthood

This text needs no additional introduction, as we have explored its contents numerous times throughout this study. But we have not yet touched on Origen's own introductory remarks. Despite this being a Gospel commentary, he tellingly begins his labor by taking his readers back to a discussion of priesthood and offering in the Old Testament. The opening lines read thus:

> Just as the people of old, who were called the people of God, were divided into twelve tribes plus the Levitical order, and this order itself, which engaged in service of the Divine, was divided into additional priestly and Levitical orders, so, I think, all the people of Christ according to "the hidden man of the heart," who bear the name "Jew inwardly" and who have been circumcised "in spirit," possess the characteristics of the tribes in a more mystical [μυστικώτερον] manner.[35]

From the very beginning, the reader is meant to see that there is a connection between tribe, priesthood, and scriptural commentary, even if the exact nature of the connection remains obscure. Origen goes on to discuss the role of these tribes in the book of Revelation as well, identifying the 144,000 sealed "virgins" as "those who

[35] *ComJn* 1.1; see 1 Pt 3:4; Rom 2:29.

have believed in Christ and who themselves are from the tribes, even though their physical race does not appear to go back to the seed of the patriarchs."[36] The maneuver frees him to apply this tribal theme to all Christians in a broadly spiritual manner.

Still, in his own words, "What do all these things mean for us?"[37] He begins his answer by constructing a tribal hierarchy among Christians. At the top of the hierarchy is that singular high priest said to be "in the order of Melchisedech," namely, Christ. Beneath him are those high priests in the "order of Aaron," followed by all those who belong to the tribe of the Levites more generally. Finally, there are those who belong to other tribes, "who have a little fellowship with the priests and support the service of God in a few things." Origen therefore evaluates even those in the non-Levitical tribes according to their relationship with the priestly tribe. As a result, each and every person either attains to or falls short of the high priestly role. Ultimately, notes Origen, "those who devote themselves to the divine Word and truly exist by the service of God alone will properly be said to be Levites and priests in accordance with the excellence of their activities in this work," and furthermore, "those who excel all others and who hold, as it were, the first places of their generation will be high priests according to the order of Aaron, but not according to the order of Melchisdech."[38]

Not surprisingly, "devoting oneself to the divine Word" and "existing by the service of God alone" takes place through righteous activity, or righteous πρᾶξις, but

[36] *ComJn* 1.4; see Rv 14:1–5.

[37] *ComJn* 1.9.

[38] For the hierarchy presented in full, see *ComJn* 1.10–11.

as a result of the priestly theme, Origen will describe this πρᾶξις almost exclusively through the language of priestly *offering*:

> Those from the tribes, on the one hand, offer tithes and firstfruits to God through the Levites and priests, not having all things as firstfruits or tithes. But the Levites and priests, although all their possessions consist of tithes and firstfruits, offer tithes to God through the high priest and, I think, firstfruits too.[39]

For Origen, spiritual priesthood is determined most by what one offers up to God, the "tithes" (δεκάται) and "firstfruits" (ἀπαρχή) of one's life, and as a result, the hierarchy he outlines should really be described as a hierarchy of offering. Indeed, the level of offering determines the level of priest, rather than the other way around. To be a high priest in the order of Aaron, one must offer up all the firstfruits (ἀπαρχή) of one's life.

This idea stands at the heart of the preface. And while Origen notes that "we wish to have *all* our activity [πρᾶξις] as the firstfruits of many firstfruits,"[40] he goes on to prioritize one activity above all others: the interpretation of Scripture. With reference to his long absence from Alexandria, he asks Ambrose, "What more excellent activity ought there be, after our physical separation from one another, than the careful examination of the gospel [ἡ περὶ εὐαγγελίου ἐξέτασις]?"[41] The examination of the gospel is the greatest of these ἀπαρχή, and any who participate in this act of offering belong to the tribe of the great high priests. Furthermore, this rhetorical question Origen poses to Ambrose serves finally to link the theme of priesthood to the task of scriptural exegesis.

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[39] Ibid., 1.9.

[40] Ibid., 1.12; emphasis mine.

[41] Ibid.

It is no coincidence that Origen writes specifically of examining the *gospel* (εὐαγγελίον), and not of the Scriptures more broadly. He notes, "For indeed, one might dare say that the gospel is the firstfruits of all the Scriptures,"[42] and later, "but I think that John's Gospel, which you have enjoined us to examine to the best of our ability, is the firstfruits of the Gospels."[43] These remarks reveal the supreme value of Origen's labor, and of all the words it contains. The *Commentary* itself is revealed to be the firstfruits of all firstfruits,[44] and as a result, Origen (not so subtly) identifies himself as the full embodiment of the high priesthood of Aaron.

It would be all too easy to pair this lengthy and seemingly out of place preface with the ongoing dispute between Origen and his bishop, Demetrius. By Eusebius' account, Demetrius envied Origen's growing reputation, and used his knowledge of Origen's supposed self-inflicted castration to attack his character and legitimacy. According to Eusebius' report, "Demetrius, for want of any other charge to bring against him, slandered him viciously for what he had done years before as a boy, and even dared to extend his accusations to those who had advanced him to the presbyterate."[45] We might postulate that Origen identifies the *exegete* as true high priest in order to declare his own superiority, or spiritual authority over Demetrius.

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[42] Ibid. At this point Origen draws a distinction between "firstfruits" (ἀπαρχή) and "firstling" (πρωτογέννημα), "for firstfruits are offered after all the fruits, but the firstling is offered before" (1.13). As a result, he argues, "the law of Moses is the firstling, but the gospel is the firstfruits. For the perfect Word has blossomed forth after all the fruits of the prophets up to the time of the Lord Jesus" (1.14). Ronald Heine argues that Origen exaggerates the distinction between the two terms, though the point suits Origen's purposes well enough. See R. Heine, trans., *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 34, n. 17.

[43] *ComJn* 1.21.

[44] Drawing all these terms together, Origen posits in *ComJn* 1.20: "The gospel, however, is the firstfruits of all Scripture, and we offer the firstfruits of all our future activities to the firstfruits of the Scriptures, as we have vowed." Πλὴν ἀπαρχὴ πάσης γραφῆς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, καὶ πασῶν τῶν κατ' εὐχὴν ἡμῶν πράξεων ἐσομένων ἀπαρχὴν ποιούμεθα εἰς τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τῶν γραφῶν.

[45] Eusebius, *EH* 6.8.

Additionally, if we accept Nautin's argument that Origen originally fled Alexandria as a result of the tensions with Demetrius, rather than the massacre of Caracalla, a seemingly self-aggrandizing preface such as this might be expected. But, is that a fair reading?

Origen is not an intellectually humble man, to put it mildly, but it is unlikely that he constructs this hierarchy of priesthood from a spirit of vengeance, or an inflated sense of importance. It may be just the opposite. By suggesting that the true high priest is the one who offers up his whole life to God, and who examines the Scriptures with care, Origen opens up the potential for priesthood to all Christians. The truest priest is not the one who has been ordained, but the one who diligently consumes the Word and who helps others to do the same. Demetrius is not excluded from this, and neither is the layperson.[46] Did Origen have any hidden intentions in the composition of this preface? It is impossible to know. However, having examined it with considerable depth, it should be apparent that it is less out of place than it initially seemed. By identifying the exegete as priest, and the Scriptures as priestly offering, Origen sets the tone for the whole of the commentary, and indeed every scriptural commentary. The reader is meant to understand that the Scriptures are not merely texts to be dissected, and that their interpretation is not merely an intellectual pursuit. The whole endeavor is a *priestly* one, a righteous offering, the ἀπαρχή of all ἀπαρχή.

Though Origen does not yet justify his remarks by equating Scripture with the

[46] This theme is not exclusive to *ComJn*. In *HomJos* 9.5, for example, Origen states, "For indeed whoever lives by a priestly religion and by holiness are themselves truly the priests and Levites of the Lord. It is not just those who seem to sit in the priestly assembly, but even more those who behave in a priestly manner. Their portion is the Lord, and they do not possess any portion on the earth. They carry the law of God on their shoulders, namely, by doing and accomplishing through their work those things that are written in the law." See also *HomLev* 1.5; 4.6; 5.4; 9.1.8–9.

enfleshed Word of God, he has already set the stage for that discussion. Scriptural interpretation is the ultimate priestly act. The language of sacrifice is the logical next step. For that, Origen will turn to the topic of the passover and the noetic consumption of the paschal lamb.

The Passover Laws

Shifting forward to Book Ten, Origen encounters the phrase, "And the passover of the Jews was at hand,"[47] when he comes to John's account of the temple cleansing. Noting the redundancy of the wording, as there is no other passover beside that of the Jews,[48] he searches for a more spiritual meaning by contrasting this description with that found in Exodus 12, where the feast is described as the "passover of the Lord."[49] The meaning, he argues, is that the "passover of the Jews" is a way of describing a passover feast that is specifically human in nature, rather than spiritual. It is a feast that causes God to declare, "My soul hates your fasting and abstention and your new moons and feasts."[50] It is a feast founded on the letter, rather than the spirit. If one wishes to celebrate the passover *of the Lord*, says Origen, it must be celebrated "in spirit and in truth,"[51] and doing so means affirming the Pauline declaration, "For also Christ our pasch is sacrificed" (Καὶ γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός).[52] The recognition of Christ as the true paschal lamb therefore

[47] Jn 2:13.

[48] *ComJn* 10.67.

[49] Ibid., 10.70; see Ex 12:11.

[50] *ComJn* 10. 73; see Is 1:13–14.

[51] *ComJn* 10.68; see Jn 4:24.

[52] *ComJn* 10.82, 87, 92; see 1 Cor 5:7. Origen will make an almost identical argument in *ComJn* 28.224–232.

allows the Christian to participate in the spiritual "passover of the Lord," and to do so every day.[53]

Still, there are a number of problems with the belief that the passover is a type for the *suffering* of Christ. First of all, argues Origen, "If the sheep sacrificed by the Jews is a type of sacrifice of Christ [ἡ Χριστοῦ θυσία], it is necessary either that they sacrifice one, and not many sheep, just as there is one Christ, or since many sheep are sacrificed, we must seek many Christs [πολλοί χριστοι], as it were, who are sacrificed in conformity with the type."[54] Second, notes Origen, the sheep is sacrificed by those who are obeying the law, whereas Christ is sacrificed by those who are transgressing it.[55] Finally, while recognizing the obvious typology between the unbroken bones of the sheep and the unbroken bones of Christ, Origen notes the difficulty of typologically interpreting those passages that speak of "roasting" the flesh of the animal with fire, rather than of boiling it, or of eating "the head with the feet and the entrails."[56] The typology is therefore inexact, and indeed problematic. In his later work, Origen will reject the notion that the passover is a type of the suffering of Christ altogether, in favor of the argument that it is a type of Christ himself. But here, he skips over the first two objections, as well as the "ten thousand

[53] On this "perpetual" feast, see *HomNum* 23.3.1: "The reason for this is so that each one who wants to be perfect and holy may know that it is not merely now and then that one must celebrate a feast for God … On the contrary, always and perpetually the just person should celebrate the feast day" (*sed semper et indesinenter iustus agree debet diem festum*). Cécile Blanc comments, "Car qui a compris que 'notre Pâque, le Christ a été immolé,' et qu'il s'agit de célébrer la fête en mangeant la chair du Verbe, celui-là ne cesse de fêter la Pâque—ce qui veut dire 'passage'—car il passe sans cesse des affaires de cette vie à Dieu, par la pensée, la parole et l'action." SC 157:430, n.1.

[54] *ComJn* 10.92

[55] Ibid., 10.93.

[56] Ibid; see Ex 12:8–9: "They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled with water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts."

other matters besides these"[57] in order to dedicate his time to the third. How is the Christian meant to roast and consume the flesh of Christ, the true paschal lamb? As we ought to expect by now, Origen turns to the Bread of Life Discourse:

> But we must say that if the Word became flesh, and the Lord says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day; for my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him," perhaps this is the flesh [σὰρξ] of the lamb which takes away the sin of the world, and perhaps this is the blood from which one must put some on the two doorposts and on the lintel in the houses in which we eat the pasch. And perhaps we must eat of the meat [κρέα] of this lamb in the time of the world, which is night. And we must eat the meat roasted with fire with unleavened bread.[58]

Between the passover commands, Paul's declaration of Christ as paschal lamb, and the Bread of Life discourse, Origen once more constructs a scriptural matrix within which the discussion can take place. For him, John 6:53–56 is simply the repetition of the passover command, but with the revelation that Jesus himself is the true lamb. Following the Exodus passage itself, then, Origen interprets the various laws about the consumption of the lamb Christologically, in a point-by-point manner.

"Do Not Eat Any of It Raw or Boiled with Water"

Here, Origen begins to identify the flesh of Christ, the true paschal lamb, with

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[57] *ComJn* 10.96.

[58] *ComJn* 10.99; see Jn 6:53–56. Λεκτέον δὲ ὅτι εἰ ὁ λόγος γέγονε σὰρξ καί φησιν ὁ κύριος· « Ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε τὴν σάρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πήτε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς. Ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον, κάγὼ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ· ἡ γὰρ σάρξ μου ἀληθής ἐστιν βρῶσις καὶ τὸ αἷμα μου ἀληθής ἐστιν πόσις. Ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει κἀγὼ ἐν αὐτῷ », μήποτε αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ σὰρξ τοῦ αἴροντος τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου ἀμνοῦ, καὶ τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὸ αἷμα ἀφ' οὗ τιθέναι δεῖ ἐπὶ τῶν δύο σταθμῶν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν φλιὰν ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις, ἐν οἷς ἐσθίομεν τὸ πάσχα, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν τοῦ ἀμνοῦ τούτου δεῖ φαγεῖν κρεῶν ἐν τῷ τοῦ κόσμου χρόνῳ, ὅς ἐστιν νύξ· ὀπτὰ δὲ τὰ κρέα πυρὶ βρωτέον μετὰ τοῦ ἀπὸ ἀζύμων ἄρτου. Origen will continue to use σὰρξ ("flesh") and κρέα ("meat") interchangeably, because he perceives Jesus' use of σὰρξ in John 6:53–56 to be in direct connection to Ex 12:8, which uses κρέα. In fact, he will occasionally use the plural form, σάρκες, to better reflect the plural κρέα, despite the fact that Jesus uses the singular. See n. 92.

the Scriptures. He provides no justification for this maneuver as he will in *Peri Pascha*, but the decision should come as no surprise for those well acquainted with his work. For Origen, Scripture is always the flesh of the Word. He writes:

> One must not, therefore, eat the flesh of the lamb raw, as the slaves of the letter do in the manner of animals which are irrational [ἄλογοι] and quite savage. In relation to men who are truly rational [λογικοί] through their desire to understand the spiritual aspects of the word [λόγος], the former share the company of wild beasts. We must strive, however, in transforming the rawness of Scripture into boiled food, not to transform what has been written into what is flaccid, watery, and limp. This is what they do who "have itching ears and" turn them away "from the truth," and transform the anagogic meanings so far as they are concerned to the carelessness and wateriness of their manner of life.[59]

To eat the flesh raw is to eat it "as the slaves of the letter" (οἱ τῆς λέξεως δοῦλοι), which is to say that if one neglects the spiritual meaning of the text, choosing instead to read only at the surface or "somatic" level, the flesh of Christ remains uncooked. As Origen notes, only savage beasts would eat uncooked flesh, making the slave of the letter a truly irrational (ἄλογος) animal. And yet, his criticism does not stop with the literal interpretation of the law. Boiling of the flesh is also prohibited, and for this, Origen turns quite obviously to Heracleon, to whom he is partially responding, and the other so-called "gnostic" writers. To boil the flesh of Christ is to make the Scriptures "flaccid, watery, and limp," by making them mean whatever one might want them to mean, and by transforming "the anagogic meanings so far as they are concerned to the carelessness and wateriness of their manner of life." Those who boil the Scriptures do look beyond the letter, to a degree, but they do so in a dishonest and

[59] *ComJn* 10.103–4; see 2 Tm 4:3–4. Οὐκ ὠμὴν οὖν βρωτέον τὴν σάρκα τοῦ ἀμνοῦ, ὥσπερ ποιοῦσιν οἱ τῆς λέξεως δοῦλοι τρόπον ἀλόγων ζῴων καὶ ἀποτεθηριωμένων, πρὸς τοὺς ἀληθῶς λογικοὺς διὰ τοῦ συνιέναι βούλεσθαι τὰ πνευματικὰ λόγου, μεταλαμβάνοντες θηρίων ἀπηγριωμένων. Φιλοτιμητέον δὲ τῷ εἰς ἕψησιν μεταλαμβάνοντι τὸ ὠμὸν τῆς γραφῆς μὴ ἐπὶ τὸ πλαδαρώτερον καὶ ὑδαρέστερον καὶ ἐκλελυμένον μεταλαμβάνειν τὰ γεγραμμένα, ὅπερ τοιοῦσιν οἱ « κνηθόμενοι τὴν ἀκοὴν καὶ ἀπὸ μὲν τῆς ἀληθείας » ἀποστρέφοντες αὐτήν, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸ ἀνειμένον καὶ ὑδαρέστερον τῆς πολιτείας μεταλαμβάνοντες τὰς κατ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἀναγωγάς.

harmful way, fitting the text to their own narratives or theological systems and thus watering them down.[60]

"They Shall Eat the Flesh That Night, Roasted; with Unleavened Bread and Bitter Herbs They Shall Eat It"

To explain what it is to eat the flesh of Christ "roasted" (ὀπτός), Origen cites a number of scriptural texts that employ the language of "fire" or "burning":

> But let us, by means of the boiling spirit and the fiery words given by God, such as Jeremiah received from the one who said to him, "Behold I have placed my words in your mouth as fire," roast the meat of the lamb so that those who partake of it say, as Christ speaks in us, "Our heart was burning in the way as he opened the Scriptures to us." But we will have to roast the meat of the lamb in order to seek such a goal. We must compare the confession of what Jeremiah had suffered for the words of God when he said, "And it was as a fire burning, blazing in my bones, and I am weak from every side and am not able to bear it."[61]

There is a certain lack of specificity in this passage. Of course, Origen mentions the crucial role of the Holy Spirit, but with no procedural explanation. His mention of Luke 24:32, the exclamation of the two disciples who walked with Jesus on the road

[60] R. Daly suggests that Origen typically refers to four different types of readers: (1) the Jews who cling to the letter and thus reject Christ; (2) the gnostics who cling to the letter in order to discredit Scriptures not to their liking; (3) the simple faithful who cling to the letter out of ignorance, thus opening themselves up to ridicule; and (4) the perfect who are able and willing to look beyond the letter to the spirit. Robert J. Daly, trans., *Origen: Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue of Origen with Heraclides and His Fellow Bishops on the Father, the Son, and the Soul*, ACW 54 (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 90, n.49. In this case, however, Origen seems to suggest that the "gnostics" are not only guilty of clinging to the letter, but of utilizing the "anagogic" sense inappropriately. As Peter Martens points out, "the suggestion that literalism was the cardinal exegetical deficiency of his rivals is unhelpful, if not misleading. We should not overlook that Origen leveled numerous other criticisms against his opponents' exegesis, not simply that they were occasionally literalists … Moreover, Origen's most trenchant critique of his two main exegetical rivals was profoundly doctrinal." *Origen and Scripture*, 107.

[61] *ComJn* 10.105; see Jer 5:14; Lk 24:32; Jer 20:9. Ἡμεῖς δὲ τῷ ζέοντι πνεύματι καὶ τοῖς διδομένοις ὑπὸ θεοῦ διαπύροις λόγοις, ὁποίους Ἱερεμίας εἰλήφει ἀπὸ τοῦ λέγοντος πρὸς αὐτόν· « Ἰδοὺ δέδωκα τοὺς λόγους μου εἰς τὸ στόμα σου πῦρ », ὀπτὰ ποιήσωμεν τὰ κρέα τοῦ ἀμνοῦ, ὥστε τοὺς μεταλαμβάνοντας αὐτῶν λέγειν, Χριστοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν λαλοῦντος, ὅτι « Ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν χαιομένη ἦν ἐν τὴ ὁδῷ, ὡς διήνοιγεν ἡμῖν τὰς γραφάς ». εἰς δὲ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἡμᾶς ζητῆσαι πυρὶ ὀπτῆσαι δὲ ἤξει τὰ σοῦ ἀμνοῦ κρέα, παραθετέον τὴν ὁμολογίαν οὗ ἐπεπόνθει ἐπὶ τοῖς λόγοις τοῦ θεοῦ πάθους Ἱερεμίας λέγων· « Καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς πῦρ καιόμενον, φλέγον ἐν τοῖς ὀστέοις μου, καὶ παρεῖμαι πάντοθεν καὶ οὐ δύναμαι φέρειν ».

to Emmaus, provides what is perhaps the best insight. It was Jesus who opened up the Scriptures to them, and when he did so, Luke records that "he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."[62] The implication is that to roast the flesh of Christ, the exegete must undergo that same experience. He/she must actively seek Christ in every word of Scripture. Only then, upon finding him there, can each one say, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" Only then can the reader avoid eating his flesh raw or boiled. Returning to our original claim, it is the recognition of Christ in the Scriptures that allows the reader/interpreter to both roast and consume his flesh.[63]

"Its Head with Its Legs and Its Inner Parts"

This final portion of the command, to eat the lamb's head together with its legs and inner parts is, for Origen, an obvious reference to maintaining the unity of the Scriptures. And yet there is diversity within that unity, as represented by each part of the lamb's body:

> We must begin eating from the head, that is from the most important and principal teachings [ἀρχικά δόγματα] about heavenly things [ἐπουράνιοι], and we must end at the feet, that is the final elements of the lessons which investigate the uttermost nature in the things which exist [ἡ τελευταῖα ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν φύσις], either that of material things, or things under the earth, or evil spirits and unclean demons.
>
> For the teaching concerning them, being different than themselves, can, since it is stored up in the mysteries of Scripture, be named figuratively "feet" of the lamb. We must also not abstain from the entrails and the inner and hidden parts. We must, however, approach all the Scripture as one body [ἕν σῶμα], and not break or cut through the most vigorous and firm bonds in the harmony of its total composition. This is what they have done who have, so

[62] Lk 24:27.

[63] As for the "bitter herbs," Origen presents two related possibilities: that these herbs are the "godly grief … which produces in us a repentance unto salvation," or that they are the "visions of the truth which we discover because of our trials" (*ComJn* 10.102).

far as it is in their power, broken the unity of the Spirit in all the Scriptures.[64] There are three distinctive points in this passage. First, Origen gives direction to the eating of the Lamb, by prioritizing the consumption of the head over the consumption of the feet. The reader is to begin with the head, which entails "the most important and principal teachings about heavenly things." The feet, on the other hand, are the "final elements of the lessons which investigate the uttermost nature in the things which exist." The examples listed here suggest that "the things which exist" are specifically those things that come *into* existence, as opposed to the heavenly things that do not. There is good reason to suspect that he presents this particular order as a result of the layout of his recently completed masterpiece, *On First Principles*, where he investigates first the nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit before turning to rational natures such as human beings, angels, demons, principalities, and so on.[65] In any case, he notes that it is specifically the "teaching" (λόγος) concerning these things that can be called the "feet of the lamb," not the things themselves, precisely because those teachings are found within the text.

Second, he remarks that the reader must not fail to eat the entrails of the lamb, which he defines as the "inner and hidden parts." His meaning is plain, and for this reason he does not elaborate any further. The reader must search for the hidden

[64] *ComJn* 10.106–7. Ἀρκτέον δὲ ἐν τῷ ἐσθίειν ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς, τουτέστιν τῶν κορυφαιοτάτων καὶ ἀρχικῶν δογμάτων περὶ τῶν ἐπουρανίων, καὶ καταληκτέον ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας, τὰ ἔσχατα τῶν μαθημάτων τὰ ζητοῦντα περὶ τῆς τελευταίας ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν φύσεως, ἤτοι τῶν ὑλικωτέρων ἢ τῶν καταχθονίων ἢ τῶν πονηρῶν πνευμάτων καὶ ἀκαθάρτων δαιμονίων. Ὁ γὰρ περὶ αὐτῶν λόγος, ἕτερος ὢν αὐτῶν, ἐναποκείμενος τοῖς μυστηρίοις τῆς γραφῆς δύναται τροπικώτερον « πόδες » ὠνομάσθαι τοῦ ἀμνοῦ. Καὶ τῶν ἐνδοσθίων δὲ καὶ ἐσωτερικῶν καὶ ἀποκεκρθμμένων οὐκ ἀφεκτέον. Ὡς ἑνὶ δὲ σώματι τῇ ἁπάσῃ προσελθετέον γραφῇ, καὶ τᾶς ἐν τῇ ἁρμονίᾳ τῆς πάσης συνθέσεως αὐτῆς εὐτονωτάτας καὶ στερροτάτας συνοχὰς οὐ συντριπτέον οὐδὲ διακοπτέον ὅπερ πεποιήκασιν οἱ τὴν ἑνότητα τοῦ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς πνεύματος τὸ ὅσον ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῖς συντρίβοντες.

[65] Or conversely, though unlikely, he chooses that particularly layout for *On First Principles* because of the structure of the passover commands.

spirit of the text, not remaining at the surface level of the letter.

Third, he speaks of the unity of the Scriptures themselves. They must be consumed together, "as one body." This comment is no doubt meant as a criticism of those who would divide the Scriptures up, as figures like Marcion were often accused of doing. In the words of Blanc, "Ils cherchent à mettre le Verbe en pièces pour en prendre une partie, parce que leurs vases sont trop petits pour le recevoir tel qu'il est."[66] For Origen, this is equivalent to breaking or cutting through "the most vigorous and firm bonds in the harmony of its total composition." To eat the head with the legs and the inner parts is therefore to consume the whole of the Scriptures, which is to consume the whole of Christ's flesh.

In summary, he remarks, "And thus, in a few words, let Christ, our pasch which has been sacrificed, be rendered in harmony with the interpretation of the apostle, and with the lamb in the gospel."[67] However, he maintains an important final distinction: "For we must not suppose that historical things are types of historical things, and corporeal of corporeal. Quite the contrary: corporeal things are types of spiritual things, and historical of intellectual."[68] Origen will not flush this idea out fully until the composition of *On Pascha*, but the underlying point is that the historical passover is not a type for the historical crucifixion. Historical things are not types of historical things, at least primarily. Rather, the passover is a type of Christ himself, consumed noetically through the reading and interpretation of the text.[69]

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[66] SC 157:447, n.4.

[67] *ComJn* 10.110.

[68] Ibid. Οὐ γὰρ νομιστέον τὰ ἱστορικὰ ἱστορικῶν εἶναι τύπους καὶ τὰ σωματικὰ σωματικῶν, ἀλλὰ τὰ σωματικὰ πνευματικῶν καὶ τὰ ἱστορικὰ νοητῶν.

[69] Origen also mentions here what he calls "the third pasch" (τὸ τρίτον πάσχα), which "will be celebrated with ten thousand angels in a most perfect assembly and a most blessed exodus" (*ComJn*

The *Commentary on John* is not itself a pure treatise on passover, priesthood, or sacrifice, as *On Pascha* will turn out to be, but it introduces us to these themes in a unique and stimulating way. From the very beginning, the reader is invited into the high priestly role, and the interpretation of Scripture is described as a priestly act. Christ is presented as the true passover lamb, and the Scriptures are equated with his flesh. The result is that through a Christological reading of the text, the priestly interpreter roasts the flesh of the lamb and consumes it, thereby fulfilling the passover laws and the dominical command of John 6:53–56. There is a sense in which Origen is still working out some of the finer points of this theology, and he does not connect these ideas as explicitly as we might expect. His meaning, however, is unequivocal and falls into line with everything we have found thus far. As we turn now to *On Pascha*, we will find a much more developed, straightforward, and overt exploration of the very same themes.

On Pascha

The Meaning of "Passover"

Somewhere in the mid 240s, well after his final departure for Caesarea and the completion of Book Ten of the *Commentary on John*, Origen dedicates an entire treatise to the passover, entitled *On Pascha*.[70] Much of what he says echoes that

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10.111). For more on this in relation to both Eucharist and Scripture, see Dively Lauro, "Eschatological Significance," 95–102.

[70] Nautin proposes 245 as a very rough date, but notes that it could have composed anytime between 235 and 248. His reasoning is as follows: at two different places in Book Ten of the *Commentary on John*, Origen remarks that a full treatment of the passover would require its own "special and voluminous study" (10.88, 96), and as Nautin points out, "Il ne parle pas de ce traité spécial comme d'un ouvrage qu'il avait déjà écrit mais comme d'un ouvrage qu'il conviendrait d'écrire." *On Pascha* thus dates to a period after the composition of *ComJn* 10. Furthermore, because Origen begins *ComJn* 6 with a brief discussion of his departure from Alexandria for Caesarea (a move Nautin dates to 234 or 235), we are left with roughly 235 as the earliest possible date for the

found in *ComJn* 10, but his purpose for this particular composition is much different. In *ComJn* 10, he discusses the passover becomes he is commenting on a peculiar Johannine phrase. *On Pascha*, however, serves not merely as a commentary or as a homily, but as a direct corrective for other erroneous Christian interpretations of the passover. The opening lines provide the best context:

> Before beginning a word-for-word exegesis of the passover, a few words about the mere name of the passover are in order. Most of the brethren, indeed perhaps all, think that the passover [πάσχα] takes its name from the passion [πάθος] of the Savior. Among the Hebrews, however, the real name of this feast is not πάσχα but *fas* [φας]—the three letters of *fas* and the rough breathing, which is much stronger with them than it is with us, constituting the name of this feast which means "passage" [διάβασις].[71] For since it is on this feast that the people come out of Egypt, it is thus called *fas*, that is, "passage" [διάβασις]. Because it is not possible in the Greek language to pronounce this word the way the Hebrews do, since the Greeks are unable to pronounce *fas* with the stronger breathing in force among the Hebrews, the word was Hellenized: in the prophets it is called *fasek* [φασὲκ], and when Hellenized more completely, the word becomes πάσχα.[72]

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composition of both *ComJn* 10 and *On Pascha*. As for the terminal date of 248, Nautin looks to Origen's mention of "five loaves of wheat" and "seven loaves of barley" in *PPasch* 23.-3 to 24.8, a reference to the feeding of the four thousand (see Mt 16:30–39; Mk 8:1–10). However, as Origen realizes later, there is no mention of "seven loaves of barley" anywhere in the New Testament, and he does not correct his mistake until Book Nine of the *Commentary on Matthew*, written around 248. For more on the dating, see Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre*, 108–10.

[71] Among the various Greek-speaking commentators, Jewish or Christian, the word used for "passage" varies, from ὑπερβασία (Josephus), to διάβασις or διαβατήρια (Philo), to ὑπέρβασις (Aquila). Like Philo, both Clement and Origen opt for διάβασις (see *PPasch* 1.18, 22; 2.17; 4.18, 22), though Origen will also occasionally use ὑπέρβασις as well (45.14; 47.33). Guéraud and Nautin suggest the latter is typically used in instances of "dépassement" or "franchissement," rather than of mere passage. On the other hand, Daly cautiously posits that διάβασις might be used in relation to the exodus, whereas ὑπέρβασις is used in relation to the resurrection and ascension of Christ. For more, see R. Daly, trans., *Origen: Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue of Origen with Heraclides*, 91–92, n.3; O. Guéraud and P. Nautin, eds., *Origène: Sur la Pâque*, Christianisme Antique 2 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 114.

[72] Guéraud and Nautin explain that the Hebrew word פסח is today pronounced *pesach* according to the vocalization of the Masoretes, but that in Origen's era it was pronounced *fasch*, with an aspiration of the initial *p*. Furthermore, Origen is aware that the Hebrew guttural transliterates best with a χ (φασεχ), rather than a κ (φασεκ), which is why he considers the latter form to be Hellenized (attributed to the prophets as a result of the form found in Jer 38:8). However, Guéraud and Nautin also point out that the word πάσχα is not a "more Hellenized" version as Origen indicates, but is actually a transcription of the Aramaic emphatic פסחא. See Guéraud and Nautin, *Origène: sur la pâque*, 114, nn. 2–4.

Origen has more than one intention in this treatise. Aside from providing a "word-for-word" (κατὰ λέξιν) exegesis of the passover, he intends also to correct the interpretation which "most of the brethren" hold, namely, that the word πάσχα is somehow a derivative of πάσχειν ("to suffer"), which might suggest that the passover is a type for the Passion, or the suffering of Christ. This is a problem that Origen has already brought up in the *Commentary on John*,[73] but only indirectly, and it is also one that had plagued the church for some time.

The debate itself stems from at least the time of the second-century Quartodeciman controversy, which arose over the appropriate timing for the celebration of pascha (either on the 14th of Nisan, the same date as the Jewish passover, or on the Sunday following it). While we need not rehash the details here, this controversy provided the occasion for one of the first great Christian treatises on passover, *On Pascha*, by Melito of Sardis. Melito, who belonged to the so-called Quartodeciman party, follows the chronology of the synoptics, which places the Last Supper at the same time as the Jewish passover and ostensibly justifies the celebration of the Christian pascha on that date. Furthermore, Melito opts for the πάσχα/πάσχειν etymology, which was crucial to the debate.[74] As Guéraud and Nautin explain, "Les partisans du dimanche soutenaient que la Pâque chrétienne devait se célébrer le jour où Jésus était ressuscité; Méliton montrait, à l'inverse, que le nom même de Pâque évoquait la Passion de Jésus, laquelle n'avait pas eu lieu un

[73] *ComJn* 10.92–93.

[74] Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha* 46. "What is the pascha? It is called by its name because of what constitutes it: from 'suffer' comes 'suffering.' Therefore learn who is the suffering one, and who shares in the suffering one's suffering, and why the Lord is present on the earth to surround himself with the suffering one, and take him to the heights of the heavens." Trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *On Pascha: With the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans*, Popular Patristics 20 (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).

dimanche."[75] The debate therefore had very practical consequences.

In his refutation of Melito, Apollinaris of Hierapolis (ca. 161–180) opts instead for the Johannine chronology, which places the Last Supper on the *eve* of the Jewish passover.[76] The implication is that Jesus did not celebrate passover with the Jews, and as a result, neither must Christians now. He too follows the πάσχα/πάσχειν argument, though he does so for the purpose of opposing Melito's position. If passover prefigures the actual suffering of Christ, so the argument goes, then the timing of the *Last Supper* (and the first Eucharist of the newly baptized) need not correspond to the Jewish passover.

Finally, Clement of Alexandria, who also follows the Johannine chronology, explicitly rejects the πἀσχα/πἀσχειν etymology, following the older etymological argument of Philo. For Philo, pascha was, historically, the recollection of the Israelite exodus from Egypt, and allegorically, the figural passage of the soul from the world of the senses to the world of the intellect.[77] Clement draws on this, but adds to it the argument that passover is a Christ of type himself, employing the phraseology of Paul ("For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed").[78] Origen, as we have already begun to see, relies heavily on this argument for his own interpretation.

To whom, then, is Origen responding? His opening words suggest that the treatise is meant merely as a general response to an erroneous argument that was growing in popularity, but it may be that he also had a particular individual in mind.

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[75] Guéraud and Nautin, *Origène: sur la pâque*, 98.

[76] Preserved only in the Byzantine *Paschal Chronicle* (PG 92, 80C-81A).

[77] See Philo, *On the Special Laws* 2.145–47; *Moses* 2.224; *Who Is the Heir* 192; *On the Migration of Abraham* 25; *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 4–19.

[78] Clement's position is also preserved in the *Paschal Chronicle* (PG 92, 81A-C), as well as in the *Stromates* (2.11.51).

Not long before the composition of *On Pascha*, Hippolytus, a contemporary of Origen's, wrote his own influential treatise on the subject entitled *On Holy Pascha*. Though only one definitively authentic phrase survives, preserved in the Byzantine *Paschal Chronicle*, it is enough to decipher his position: "Christ does not eat the passover, but he suffers it" (τὸ δὲ πάσχα οὐκ ἔφαγεν ἀλλ' ἔπαθεν).[79] Hippolytus thus picks up the πάσχα/πάσχειν etymological once more.

That said, this is not the treatise Origen ultimately interacts with. There is another work entitled *On the Passover* that is also attributed to Hippolytus, but which is likely a revised version of that earlier treatise adapted into the form of a homily. Remarkably, the thematic and structural format of Origen's own treatise suggests that it was meant to be a direct reply to this homily. The first part of this Hippolytus-inspired homily covers the passover and exodus from Egypt, as well as a detailed interpretation of Ex 12:1–15 and 43–49. The second part treats the Passion and the various episodes involved, including the descent into hell, the resurrection, and the ascension into heaven. Guéraud, Nautin, and Daly all make the case that Origen composes *On Pascha* as a specific response to the treatise by Hippolytus. As Guéraud and Nautin point out:

> Il est notable que les deux thèmes nouveaux que nous voyons apparaître dans le *Peri Pascha* répondent exactement aux caractéristiques de l'ouvrage d'Hippolyte … Le traité d'Hippolyte …comportait deux livres—qui étaient très probablement, nous l'avons vu, deux livres—dont l'une était consacrée au chapitre de l'Exode sur la Pâque, et l'autre aux divers épisodes de la Passion, considérée comme la réalité annoncée par la Pâque juive.[80]

It would seem that Origen chooses the same bipartite format, focusing first on the type and then on the reality. For him, however, that reality is specifically *not* the

[79] *Paschal Chronicle* (PG 92, 80B-C).

[80] Guéraud and Nautin, *Origène: sur la pâque*, 110–11.

Passion.[81] In the following section, we will examine the portion of Origen's treatise that deals specifically with the consumption of the passover lamb.

The Passover Laws

Having covered the preliminary points, Origen enters into what is meant to be a "word-for-word exegesis" of the passover. He wastes no time in putting forth his central claim:

> That the passover still takes place today [σήμερον], that the sheep is sacrificed and the people come up out of Egypt, this is what the Apostle is teaching when he says, "For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."[82]

Origen's concern yet again is to demonstrate that Christ is the true paschal lamb,

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[81] Following Guéraud and Nautin, Daly adds, "Origen's first 38 pages constitute a treatise in the form of a commentary on Exod. 12:1-11. He develops the spiritual meaning of these verses as they apply to Christ and to the Christians. The final 12 pages constitute a second treatise, which begins with the announcement that it is going to expound the spiritual meaning of the passover. But this had already been done at some length in the first part. This awkwardness is easily explainable if one assumes that Origen followed this structure in order to make his treatise more obviously a corrective to Hippolytus. Since Hippolytus' second part was largely a treatment of Christ's passion, which Origen wants to avoid in this work, his own second part ends up being disproportionately brief." Daly, *Treatise on the Passover*, 9.

[82] *PPasch* 3.8–18; see 1 Cor 5:7–8. The single codex of *On Pascha* (Papyrus No. 88746), kept in the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo, is in relatively poor condition. Along with four of Origen's other works, it was discovered in 1941 in a limestone cave beneath the ruins of a monastery in Tura. The lids had been removed from the jars, exposing it to significant insect damage (and hinting that preservation may not have been the monks' primary intention). The codex is made up of three quires of eight sheets each, and a final quire of two sheets. The second quire was found particularly exposed, and the top half of its pages are almost completely missing. Fortunately, in producing the first and only critical edition of this treatise, Guéraud and Nautin found that much of what was missing could be reconstructed from other sources like the Greek exegetical catenae, the catena-like commentary on the Octateuch and Kings by Procopius of Gaza, and a Latin catena attributable to Victor of Capua. In this chapter, I will therefore note where the text has been reconstructed, but will rely on it freely. Following the example of Guéraud and Nautin, the citation numbering refers to codex page number and line. When, as a result of damage, there is no top of the page from which to count, a minus sign before the line number indicates that the count begins at the bottom of the codex page. Thus 23.-10 refers to codex page 23, 10 lines from the bottom. To avoid confusion, I will (following Daly) use the preposition *to* instead of a dash (e.g., 22.1 to -5) to refer to passages of more than one line in length. Additionally, while the translations are often Daly's, the line numbers do not correspond to the English text, but to the Greek. See Daly, *Treatise on the Passover*, 1–2, 4–5, 17–19; O. Guéraud, "Note préliminaire sur le papyrus d'Origène découvert à Toura," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 136 (1946): 93–103. For a much more detailed account, see Guéraud and Nautin, *Origène: sur la pâque*, 15–95.

which in turn has an affect on the whole of the exegetical procedure that follows. Again, placing Christ at the center of the text forces the reader to interpret *all* of the passover laws Christologically. Yet Origen runs into the same difficulties he encountered in the *Commentary on John*. If Christ is the true paschal lamb, then why is he sacrificed by "criminals and sinners," whereas the original passover lambs were sacrificed by the righteous? Furthermore, why is Christ one, when the passover lambs were many?[83] Origen previously dealt only with the problem of "roasting" or "boiling" the flesh of Christ, bypassing the other difficulties. Here he provides a straightforward answer to all three: if Christ is sacrificed, but not by the righteous, then "the passover is indeed a type of Christ, but not of his passion" (καὶ τύπος μὲν Χριστοῦ ἐστιν τὸ πάσχα, οὐ μέντοι γε τοῦ πάθους αὐτοῦ).[84] He rejects the assumed connection between passover and passion once more, but for theological and exegetical reasons, rather than etymological ones. The passover is not a type of the passion at all, and as a result, they need not perfectly mirror one another.[85]

Of course, the intention is not to downplay the importance of Christ's sacrificial act, or of his suffering. Being quite careful with his language, he notes that "the antitype of the passover is not his suffering; rather the passover becomes a type of Christ himself sacrificed for us" (οὐκ ἄρα ἀντίτυπος τοῦ πάσχα τὸ πάθος αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ τύπος αὐτοῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὸ πάσχα γίνεται τοῦ ὑφ' ἡμῶν θυομένου).[86] The

[83] See *PPasch* 12–15.

[84] Ibid., 13.1–3.

[85] The true type of Christ's suffering, argues Origen, is the serpent which was lifted up onto the wood by Moses (Nm 21:9; Dt 21:22-31), as indicated by Jesus' own statement in Jn 3:14, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." See *PPasch* 14.24–15.11.

[86] *PPasch* 13.10–14.

distinction is subtle, but important. The antitype is not the sacrifice *of* Christ, but it is still the *sacrificed* Christ. His suffering is not diminished, but neither is it the point. Christ himself is the point, freeing Origen to discuss the rest of the passover laws in a new and more consistent manner.

This maneuver also allows Origen to pull together many of the themes we found in scattered form throughout the *Commentary on John*. Once more, he underscores the importance of personal priesthood, but here he foregoes the discussion of firstfruits and speaks explicitly in the language of sacrifice: "It is necessary for us to sacrifice [θῦσαι] the true lamb [ἀληθὲς πρόβατον]—if we have been ordained priests, or like priests have offered sacrifice—and it is necessary for us to cook and eat its flesh."[87] And this is true not only of the church collective, but of each individual: "For each one of us first takes the lamb, then dedicates it, then sacrifices it, and thus, after roasting it, eats it, and after eating it leaves nothing until the morning and then celebrates the feast of unleavened bread after having come out of Egypt."[88] Origen's theology has not changed, but it has become more direct. Each Christian is meant to act in a priestly manner, but in this text, that involves more than the offering up of righteous firstfruits. It involves, above all, the killing and consumption of the lamb who is Christ.

Origen has made abundantly clear that the command to kill and eat cannot be understood in a "sensible" (αἰσθητός) way. It is surely not to be understood in

[87] *PPasch* 13.3–8. Ἡμᾶς γὰρ δεῖ θῦσαι τὸ ἀληθὲς πρόβατον, ἐὰν ἱερωθῶμεν ἢ ἰδοὺ τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν προσενέγκωμεν, καὶ ἡμᾶς ὀπτῆσαι καὶ ἡμᾶς φαγεῖν τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ. In *HomLev* 1.4.2, Origen speaks more explicitly about the exegetical nature of this priestly role: "I myself think that the priest who removes the hide 'of the calf' offered as 'a whole burnt offering' and pulls away the skin with which its limbs are covered is the one who removes the veil of the letter from the word of God and uncovers its interior parts which are members of spiritual understanding."

[88] Ibid., 13.14–22.

relation to a literal lamb, and neither is it to be understood in relation to the crucifixion. As for the Eucharist, any relationship there might be is absent from the discussion.[89] Again, Origen turns solely to the Bread of Life discourse: "To show that the passover is something spiritual [noetic] and not this sensible passover, he himself says, 'Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you.' Are we then to eat his flesh and drink his blood in a physical manner? But if this is said spiritually [noetically], then the passover is spiritual [noetic], not physical."[90] The reader is left with that same, now familiar question: How is this command to be obeyed?

Rarely do we find justification for the belief that the Scriptures are the flesh of Christ. It is simply assumed. In *Peri Pascha*, however, Origen advances a simple, almost formulaic rationale: "If the lamb is Christ and Christ is the Logos, what is the flesh of the divine words if not the divine Scriptures?" (Εἰ δὲ τὸ πρόβατον ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν, καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ λόγος ἐστίν, τίνες τῶν θείων λόγων αἱ σάρκες εἰ μὴ αἱ θεῖαι γραφαί;).[91] Origen again relies on his belief that there is only *one* Word of God.

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[89] R. Daly writes, "One cannot conclude from this that the sacramental Eucharist, as this came to be understood by later Christian theology, is totally unknown to Origen or rejected by him … Nevertheless, the very fact that Origen, so skilled at bringing in ideas and insights from any and all sources, did not make even one obvious allusion to the sacramental Eucharist in this whole section, suggests at least that this doctrine did not hold a strong place in his imagination and consciousness, or at least that he did not feel constrained to emphasize it on every possible occasion." Daly, *Treatise on the Passover*, 88, n. 32.

[90] *PPasch* 13.23–35. Καὶ ὅτι νοητόν ἐστι τὸ πάσχα καὶ οὐ τοῦτο τὸ αἰσθητόν, αὐτὸς λέγει· «Ἐὰν μὴ φάγητέ μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίητέ μου τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς». Ὀφείλομεν ἄρα κατὰ τὸ αἰσθητὸν τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ τρώγειν καὶ τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ πίνειν; Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο νοητῶς λέγει, ἄρα νοητὸν καὶ οὐκ αἰσθητόν ἐστι τὸ πάσχα. It is easy to read this statement as a *spiritualization* of the Eucharist, thus favoring the position of Bigg and Trigg. But it is apparent that in this case, the Eucharist is not on Origen's mind at all. For a further point of connection, Origen will create a link between Nm 9:13, where God commands that whoever does not keep the passover "shall be cut off from his people," and Jesus' words in Jn 6:53 ("unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you"). See *PPasch* 14.1–14.

[91] *PPasch* 26.5–8. This phrase has been supplied by both Catena E^{I} and Citation VI of Procopius of Gaza, though the former omits the phrase « καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ λόγος ἐστίν ». See Guéraud and Nautin, *Origène: sur la pâque*, 60–62, 70–71.

Christ is Logos, and Scripture is Logos, but this never makes for the language of λόγοι.[92] To see one is to see the other. To consume one is to consume the other. The remarkable result is that the only way to obey the command to eat the lamb is to read the very Scriptures that contain it. Interpreted Christologically, it is fulfilled the moment it is heard. And yet, proper interpretation is not easy. For this, Origen turns to the laws regarding the preparation of the lamb.

"Do Not Eat Any of It Raw or Boiled with Water, but Roasted"

Once more, Origen argues that if "some cling just to the words themselves, they would eat the flesh of the Savior raw, and in partaking of this raw flesh would merit death and not life … since the Apostle teaches us that 'the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.'"[93] And again, to "boil" his flesh is to "mix with the words of Scripture another material [ἑτέρα ὕλη] which could water it down in the cooking."[94] While these remarks are more or less identical to those in the *Commentary on John*, there is some variation in his discussion of "roasting." Above all, he discusses more directly the role of the Holy Spirit:

> If the Spirit is given us from God and "God is a devouring fire", the Spirit is also fire, which is what the Apostle is aware of in exhorting us to "be aglow with the Spirit." Therefore the Holy Spirit is rightly called fire, which it is necessary for us to receive in order to have converse with the flesh of Christ, I mean the divine Scriptures, so that, when we have roasted them with this

[92] Of course, in this passage Origen does use the plural form λόγων, but this is in reference to the actual "words" of Scripture, and should not be confused with the one, singular Word of God. Origen is simply suggesting that the "flesh" referenced in the text, the flesh of the paschal lamb, is nothing other than the Scriptures. It may seem curious that he chooses σάρξ rather than κρέας to denote "flesh", as the latter is used in the Exodus passage, but this is likely because Jesus himself uses σάρξ in the Bread of Life discourse, and Origen sees the two as inseparable.

[93] *PPasch* 26.10 to -13; see 2 Cor 3:6. A portion of this is also supplied by Catena E^{I} and Citation VI of Procopius. On this occasion, Origen openly identifies this superficial manner of reading as a Jewish practice: "For the Jews partake of [the words] raw when they rely on just the letter of the Scriptures" (*PPasch* 28.-3 to 29.1).

[94] Ibid., 28.-11 to -8.

> divine fire, we may eat them roasted with fire. For the words are changed [ἀλλοιωθήσεται, from ἀλλοίοω] by such fire, and we will see that they are sweet and nourishing [ἡδύς καὶ τρόφιμος].”[95]

Again, there is an almost equation-like explanation. If God is a “consuming fire,” and the Spirit is from God, then the Spirit must also act as fire. Unfortunately, the majority of the lines following this do not survive, and so we are once more left without much procedural detail. What is the reader meant to see? As he goes on, Origen laments that the Jews partake of the words “raw,” particularly “when they rely on just the letter of the Scriptures,” but he also adds that “if through the Spirit they see the true circumcision [ἀληθής περιτομή], if there really is a circumcision, and the true Sabbath [ἀληθινὸν σάββατον], and work while it is day before the night comes, when no one can work, they are already eating the word cooked with the Spirit.”[96] That is, it is the Spirit who reveals the true *meaning* of the text. The Spirit reveals the “true circumcision” and the “true Sabbath.” He reveals the true meaning of the whole law, and in doing so, “cooks” the flesh of Christ.[97] Ultimately, this is revealed to be yet another of Origen’s treatises on the letter versus the spirit. Though the *Commentary on John* presents a more direct emphasis on Christological interpretation with the citation of Luke 24, the result here is the same. It is *recognition* that brings about *consumption*, and for Origen, the spirit of the text can

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[95] *PPasch* 26.-12 to 27.5; see Dt 4:24; Heb 12:29; Rom 12:11. A portion of this is also supplied by Catena E^{I} and Citation VI of Procopius. Εἰ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ δίδοται ἡμῖν, ὁ δὲ θεὸς πῦρ καταναλίσκον ἐστίν, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα πῦρ ἐστιν, ὅπερ ὁ ἀπόστολος ἐπιστάμενος προτρέπεται ἡμᾶς τῷ πνεύματι ζέοντας. Καλῶς οὖν λέγεται πῦρ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, ὃ ἀναλαβόντας ἡμᾶς δεῖ προσομιλῆσαι ταῖς σαρξὶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ λέγω δὲ ταῖς θείαις γραφαῖς, ἵνα διὰ τούτου τοῦ πνευματικοῦ πυρὸς ὀπτήσαντες αὐτὰς φάγωμεν ὀπτὰς πυρὶ· ἀλλοιωθήσεται γὰρ διὰ τοῦ τοιούτου πυρὸς τὰ ῥητά, καὶ τὸ ἡδὺ καὶ τρόφιμον αὐτῶν ὀψόμεθα.

[96] *PPasch* 29.1–9. This text is supplied by Catena E^{II}. See Guéraud and Nautin, *Origène: sur la pâque*, 62–63.

[97] Similarly, Origen writes in *HomJer* 12.13.1, “If I hear the law, either I hear in a hidden way or I do not hear in a hidden way … He who hears in a hidden way the matter ordained concerning passover eats of Christ the lamb. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.”

only ever be recognized in light of Christ.[98] To put it simply, recognition is roasting.

"Its Head with Its Legs and Its Inner Parts"

In *ComJn* 10, the various portions of the lamb's body are the various teachings found in the Scriptures. The head is "the most important and principal teachings about heavenly things," whereas the feet are the "final elements of the lessons which investigate the uttermost nature in the things which exist." In *Peri Pascha*, Origen's approach is altered, focusing more on *who* is eating the various parts of the lamb than on what those parts represent. So, "some partake of its head, others of its hands, others of its breast, others of its entrails, still others of its thighs, and some even of its feet, where there is not much flesh."[99] There is great diversity among those who consume the lamb, as evidenced by the diversity of the parts themselves. And yet, the division is not arbitrary, for "we partake of a part of the true lamb according to our capacity to partake of the Word of God" (καθὸ δυνάμεθα μέρους μεταλαμβάνομεν τοῦ προβάτου τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ μεταλαμβάνοντες τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θεοῦ).[100] As with Christ's "changing forms," as well as with the *epinoiai*, Origen understands there to be a *spectrum* of understanding and ability among Christians. Each individual receives the Word differently:

> There are some who partake of the head and, if you wish, of each part of the head, for example, of the ears so that, "having ears," they can hear his words. Those who taste of the eyes will see clearly, "lest you dash your foot against a

[98] It is perhaps not without significance that when the words of the Scriptures are roasted, Origen notes that they become "sweet and nourishing," while in *HomJr* 10.2.2 he writes, "the bread of Jesus is the word in which we are nourished," and "the wood of the Passion of Jesus Christ, when it entered into the word, has made its bread sweeter." I will comment more on the role of the cross in this "roasting" process at the conclusion of the chapter.

[99] *PPasch* 30.-15 to -9. This passage is supplied by Citation VII of Procopius. See Guéraud and Nautin, *Origène: sur la pâque*, 71–72.

[100] *PPasch* 30.-5 to -2.

> stone." Those who taste the hands are the "workers" who no longer have "drooping hands" which are "closed against giving" … The studious who eat of the entrails will see "even to the depths of God" —for the entrails have a certain harmony of twists and turns and they also make for the body everything needed for life; and such function of one initiated in the mysteries … All those who partake of the thighs keep their flesh "undefiled, following wherever" Christ should lead. And they who partake of the feet, hesitant no longer, run in haste "toward the prize of the upward call of Christ."[101]

There are a few points to consider here. First of all, Origen expands the number of body parts considerably. One does not consume "the head" whole, but rather specific portions of the head, such as the ears and the eyes, which is determined by the noetic capacity of each individual. Second, unlike the "changing forms" of Jesus and the *epinoiai*, Origen does not actually present a hierarchy here. There is no advancement from the eyes to the ears, or from the feet to the entrails. These parts merely reflect the diversity of the church, which is itself the body of Christ. No part is greater than another. Finally, Origen appears to waver on whether the consumption of the eyes, for example, occurs because of one's ability to "see clearly", or whether the consumption of the eyes brings about that ability. There is room for both, but the arrangement is not rigidly defined. All Christians consume Christ according to their own needs and capacities.[102]

As for unity, Origen declares, "Varied indeed is the food of those who eat the passover, but they are all one; even he who eats the head is one with whoever eats the feet, since the head cannot say to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' For the members

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[101] Ibid., 30.-2 to 31.35. The majority of this passage is supplied by Citation VII of Procopius. See Mt 11:15; 13:9, 43; Ps 34[33]:9; Heb 6:4–5; Ps 91[90]:12; Jer 13:16; Mt 4:6; Lk 4:11; Jn 9:4; Heb 12:12; Sir 4:31; 1 Cor 2:10; Rv 14:4; Rom 12:11; Phil 3:14.

[102] In a variation of his usual interpretation, he writes the following in *PPasch* 33.19–35: "His flesh and blood, as shown above, are the divine Scriptures, eating which, we have Christ; the words becoming his bones, the flesh becoming the meaning from the text, following which meaning, as it were, 'we see in a mirror dimly' the things which are to come, and the blood being faith in the gospel of the 'new covenant,' as the Apostle attests in the following words: 'And profaning the blood of the covenant.'" See 1 Cor 5:7; 13:12; 11:25; Lk 22:20; Heb 10:29.

eaten are many but the body of Christ is one. Let us preserve, then, as well as possible the harmony of the members in order not to incur the reproach of dividing the members of Christ."[103] Again, by way of contrast, the command to eat the head together with the legs and inner parts in the *Commentary on John* meant preserving the unity of the Scriptures themselves, and each individual was meant to consume the *whole*. But despite what Origen says here, there is no contradiction. Rather, Origen has simply shifted the framework of the conversation so that the church rather than the individual is in view. To truly obey the passover command, to truly consume the flesh of Christ, both the individual and the church collective must actively search for Christ in the Scriptures, thereby "roasting" and consuming them through the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Origen goes on to discuss the remainder of the passover laws as well, but his discussion of consumption and the flesh of Christ is limited to the above, as is any overlap with the *Commentary on John*. It is striking that, despite a clear progression of thought from *ComJn* to *On Pascha*, there is a remarkable consistency between the two works. Origen is a master of offering different interpretations for different occasions, and while we might have expected a scriptural focus in the context of a scriptural commentary, he does not waver from that even as he turns to a standalone treatise on the passover. This repetition, or dedication, must be taken seriously, because it is an indication that what he has written truly lies at the heart of his exegetical work. Scripture is never just a text. It is *always* Christ, the enfleshed Word of God, and interpreting it is a nothing less than a high priestly act.

[103] *PPasch* 32.1–13. The majority of this passage is supplied by Citation VII of Procopius.

As a result, the consumption of Scripture is indeed a "sacramental" act for Origen, and there are many profound connections to be drawn with the Eucharist.[104] But this is secondary. Above all, the consumption of Christ is hermeneutical. To eat his flesh is to recognize him in every word of the text, and Origen seems always to argue this point not by way of his Eucharistic theology, but from the Scriptures themselves. That is, *Scripture* informs him that Christ is the true paschal lamb, *Scripture* informs him that the flesh of that lamb is itself Scripture, and *Scripture* prescribes the manner in which to roast and eat it. He need not look anywhere else, though he is more than willing to draw Eucharistic comparisons where they might be helpful.

But what about the blood of Christ? Is that not equally important to the command given in John 6:53? Origen admittedly dedicates far less ink to this topic, but he is no less certain of its meaning. In the *Homilies on Numbers*, for example, he comes to Balaam's pronouncement that the people of Israel would not lie down until they "drink the blood of the wounded."[105] Reading this, he asks, "Who will be such a contentious defender of the historical narrative [*historica narratio*], or rather, who will be found so dull, that he would not take refuge by sheer necessity in the sweetness of allegory [*allegoria*] and shrink back from the sound of the letter?"[106] Those very same people of Israel are offended by the command to drink Jesus' blood, but the Christians are not:

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[104] R. Smith suggests that scriptural interpretation is sacramental in a twofold sense: "(1) it is the *incarnate Word* who is present in Sacred Scripture; and (2) the scriptural word *as such* has a transformative effect on the Christian who encounters the Word of God with *faith.*" Smith, "Sacramental Word," 1.

[105] Nm 23:24: "Behold, a people! As a lioness it rises up and as a lion it lifts itself; it does not lie down till it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain."

[106] *HomNum* 16.9.1.

> The Christian people, the faithful people, hear these things and embrace them and follow him who says: "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will not have life in yourselves; for my flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink." And surely, the one who said these things was wounded for men; for "he was wounded for our sins," as Isaiah says. But we are said to drink the blood of Christ not only in the rite of sacraments, but also when we receive his words [*sermones*], in which are life, as he himself says: "The words [*verba*, ῥήματα] that I have spoken are spirit and life." Thus, he himself was wounded, whose blood we drink, that is, we receive the words [*verba*] of his teaching. Moreover, they are no less wounded who have preached his word [*verbum*] to us. For when we read their words [*verba*], that is, the words of the apostles, and when we attain to life from them, we are "drinking the blood of the wounded."[107]

This passage is an example of Origen's masterful ability to take multiple phrases and themes from throughout the Scriptures and draw them together to make one singular point. By his account, the "blood of the wounded" in Numbers must be understood as the blood of Christ, because Isaiah records that he was "wounded" for our sins. Jesus himself understood this, as evidenced by his own command to drink his blood in the Bread of Life Discourse. Moreover, Jesus understood that this blood was not to be consumed in the sacrament alone, but through his very words, which is why he describes them as "life." Though unstated, Origen sees this as a clear reference to Leviticus 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood." There are, then, no less than five passages at play here, all of which guide Origen to the conclusion that the blood of Christ is consumed directly through the Scriptures (as well as through the preaching of Scripture).

It is of course noteworthy that Origen links John 6:53 to the Eucharist, but again, he does so only as an aside. His real purpose is to discuss the "words" of

[107] *HomNum* 16.9.2; see Jn 6:53-55; Is 53:5; Jn 6:63. Commenting on this passage, Thomas Scheck notes, "This is one of the oldest Christian texts that explicitly links Jn 6:53–55 with the sacramental eating of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament of Eucharist. In the context, Origen does not exclude a metaphorical understanding of the same Scripture as well." Scheck, *Homilies on Numbers*, 100, n.1. However, as we have come to see by now, his understanding of Scripture as flesh and blood is anything but "metaphorical."

Christ and the apostles, as evidenced by the sheer number of times he references them. The historical context may not be the passover on this occasion, but the results are no less the same. Whether it is eating the flesh of the lamb or drinking the blood of the slain, Origen will point the Christian to the Scriptures every single time.

As one final point, it is worth noting Origen's constant emphasis upon consuming not only the flesh and blood of the lamb, but of the lamb *that was slain*. So, it may be that "the antitype of the passover is not his suffering," but the passover is still "a type of Christ himself *sacrificed* for us."[108] Similarly, Paul does not say only that "Christ *is* our paschal lamb," but rather that "Christ our paschal lamb *has been slain*." And again, Christians are not only to drink the blood of Christ, but the blood "of the wounded," who is Christ. These points are subtle, but crucial. Returning to Chapter Two, it is only in light of the cross that the reader/hearer is able to recognize and identify the Scriptures as the divine Word of God. Only in that light can his flesh be consumed "roasted" rather than "raw."

In *Peri Pascha*, Origen will draw a distinction between those who are able to consume Christ as "goat" and those who are able to consume him as "sheep." God commands in Exodus 12:5 that the passover lamb "shall be without blemish, a male a year old," and that it is to be taken "from the sheep or from the goats." Origen comments:

> And those who eat do not all eat in the same way but differently, each according to his own capacity; for they cannot all partake of him as lamb but some, and perhaps most, only as goat. Those then who are perfect and already making every effort to be without sin, they eat of what is taken from the sheep, because Christ is the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," but the others who still lie subject to sin will take it "from the goats," because one is told in the law to offer a goat as a sacrifice "for sin."

[108] *PPasch* 13.10–14.

It is apparent by Origen's terminology here that he considers the terms "goat" and "lamb" to be among the *epinoiai*, drawing in yet another of the major themes in this study. And though he does not indicate that those who consume him as "lamb" do so because they recognize him as the crucified one, it is significant that "lamb" is further up the hierarchy *because* the lamb is the one who "takes away the sin of the world," a reference to his death. "Lamb" is thus a truer image of his flesh, a truer revelation of his divinity, and a truer way in which to consume him. The result, for Origen, is that the reader must always strive to consume Christ as the one who is slain, and conversely, strive to perceive him as the one who is slain in order to consume him. From the centrality of the cross, to the *epinoiai*, to the consumption of Christ's flesh, this chapter is the culmination of everything we have witnessed thus far.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction, we looked briefly at the thesis of John O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, namely that patristic thinkers did not hold to a referential theory of meaning. That is, they did not assume that "our words and sentences are meaningful insofar as they successfully refer or point," specifically to a set of historical events or theological truths *beyond* them.[1] Rather, in the words of O'Keefe and Reno, "the Bible absorbed their attention rather than directing it elsewhere," and Scripture "confers meaning because it *is* divine revelation."[2] Here at the conclusion of this study, we can see the obvious merits of such a claim, but we can also see that in the case of Origen, we must nuance and modify the claim significantly.

Does Origen interpret Scripture in a non-referential manner? Rolf Gögler and Karen Jo Torjesen present two opposing positions on this question. On the one hand, Gögler emphasizes the connection between word and reality in Origen's work to such a degree that the historical and theological referents in the scriptural text become wholly secondary. The words themselves are the key, because the words themselves participate in Christ (the reality they depict): "Wie der Logos Typ und Bild des unsichtbaren Vaters ist, so ist der Wortlaut und der Buchstabe (die Schrift) Typ, Bild, Schatten des Mysteriums Logos."[3] We might say that this represents an extreme version of O'Keefe's and Reno's thesis, because the emphasis is almost exclusively upon the text itself.

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[1] O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 8.

[2] Ibid., 11–12.

[3] Gögler, *Zur Theologie des Biblischen Wortes*, 352.

Torjesen, however, explicitly disagrees with Gögler on this point, largely as a result of her extensive procedural analysis. That is to say, she examines what Origen does in practice, not only what he says in theory. Recall from the introductory chapter that Torjesen has identified four procedural steps by which she claims Origen always brings the reader into the text, particularly with relation to the Old Testament: "In a first step Origen asks, what is the grammatical sense of this text? In a second step he asks, what is the concrete and/or historical reality to which the grammatical sense refers? In a third step he asks, what is the Logos teaching through this concrete reality? In a fourth and last step Origen asks, how can this teaching be applied to the hearer of the text today?"[4] Steps one and two, argues Torjesen, reveal that the "literal sense" in Origen's work actually entails two distinctive dimensions: the "letter," or words of the text, and the "history or event which stands behind the text."[5] They are not one and the same. Rather, there is advancement from one to the other. Thus, in stark contrast to Gögler, Torjesen writes the following:

> The spiritual meaning is dependent on and developed from the historical or concrete reality to which the text refers, rather than the grammatical sense of the text itself. It is the historical reality behind the text (the history of the wanderings in Numbers) or the literary-dramatic situation (the love drama of the Songs) which contains the figurative representation of the spiritual reality, not the naked text. It is the historical pedagogy of the Logos as the content of the historical-literal sense which forms the basis for the spiritual sense. This relationship constitutes the structure of Origen's exegesis.[6]

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[4] Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 138.

[5] Ibid., 139.

[6] Ibid., 141. She adds, "At this point I find I must disagree with R. Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes*, p. 352, who takes the Hellenistic structure word—reality as the key to Origen's exegetical structure … Rather the letter gives access to the history and the history itself is the symbolic form of the spiritual reality; because it is a history of experience with the Logos it can be a symbolic representation for the activity of the Logos" (ibid., n. 99).

In other words, Origen does not present a spiritual interpretation of the bare words, but rather of the history referenced by those words.[7] That history reveals past experiences of the Logos, and those past experiences "become the model for succeeding experiences of the Logos since the pedagogy of the Logos is the same in all times."[8] Torjesen's work thus stands in contrast not only to Gögler's, but also to the notion that Origen does not hold to a referential theory of meaning. In her reading of Origen, meaning comes almost exclusively from the interpretation of external referents.

What are we to make of these opposing perspectives? We witnessed the problems with Gögler's position in chapter three, but does Torjesen present a satisfying alternative? On the one hand, perhaps without recognizing the point, we have already seen that Origen does find meaning in historical events, specifically by interpreting those events Christologically. This became most evident in chapter four, where we examined the noetic coming of Christ as a timeless, individualized experience. Origen states time and again that the Christological interpretation of the objects, acts, and events described in Scripture brings about an encounter with Christ himself. He is clearly aware that the words of Scripture often refer to something beyond themselves, and that the "something" in each case must be rightly understood (e.g., his language of the "true altar," the "true distribution of land," the "spiritual

[7] Torjesen does qualify this claim depending on genre, but never to the point of siding with Gögler. For example, she contrasts the book of Numbers with the Psalms by stating, "With Numbers, it is not the words of the text which provide the initial basis for the interpretation, as in the Psalms and Song of Songs, but rather the history which they recount" (52). By this she does not mean that in the Psalms, the words have no referent whatsoever and Origen can therefore skip "step two." Rather, she means that the key to interpreting the Psalms is not a particular historical *narrative* which lies behind the text. In the case of the Psalms, the referent becomes the personal spiritual experience of the one speaking, or the dramatic poetic setting, which must be emulated by appropriating the attitude and language of the Psalmist.

[8] Ibid., 140.

circumcision," etc.). It is therefore safe, in light of what we saw there, to say that Origen does not hold to an exclusively non-referential theory of meaning.

On the other hand, we must qualify Torjesen's claim. First, she seems to argue that the only way for the exegete to encounter the Logos through the Old Testament is to imitate the history or experience of the one writing, or the one described: "For the hearer of the Old Testament his experience with the pedagogy of the Logos must be mediated by those who experienced it and he can participate in it only by imitating them."[9] Again, it is the history *behind* the text that allows for a meaningful experience with the Logos. But while Torjesen accurately identifies many of Origen's procedural maneuvers, these kinds of blanket statements do not appropriately account for the fact that for Origen, the text itself also *is* the Logos, not just a description of literary or historical encounters *with* the Logos.[10] Surely, encouraging the imitation of biblical saints is central to Origen's exegetical endeavors, and surely this imitation does bring about an encounter with the Logos, but even more central is the noetic interpretation of every object, every act, every event, and yes, every word. Those words, as we have now seen, are themselves the enfleshed Logos of God. To put it another way, the very act of noetic reading is a direct, *unmediated* encounter with Christ.[11]

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[9] Ibid., 132.

[10] A point Torjesen herself seems at least partially to recognize when she states, "Christ is actually made present through his teachings so that hearing the teachings of Christ is to be in the presence of Christ himself" (48). But this statement is somewhat at odds with what she writes elsewhere, as evidenced by her emphasis on historical referents and on the necessity of mediated experiences with the Logos.

[11] Thus, Torjesen is only partially right when she contrasts the Old Testament with the Gospels by stating, "In the Gospels the Logos is speaking directly to the hearer, not mediated through a history other than his own" (133). Origen's exegetical practice does seem to reflect this point, but as we have seen in this study, he is equally emphatic that the Logos speaks directly through *every* scriptural text, and in fact *is* every scriptural text. He is also emphatic that every scriptural text, including the whole of the Old Testament, can rightly be called "Gospel."

Second, while Torjesen does highlight the fact that for Origen, "the biblical word is the incarnation of the eternal Logos,"[12] she tends to describe this scriptural incarnation as the manifestation of a series of progressive *doctrines* in the text: "Just as in the incarnation the Logos in taking on flesh and history becomes visible, so also in Scripture by communicating himself in the form of doctrines he becomes knowable."[13] She adds, "Each new vision of the Logos (the doctrines) produces a closer resemblance to him and simultaneously prepares for the next level of knowledge and participation."[14] Once more, Torjesen highlights something semi-external to the text: the progressive doctrines, concepts, or "teachings" about the Logos. And once more, while there is merit to this claim, we must not fail to point out that for Origen, the most fundamental way in which the Logos assumes scriptural flesh is through his "garments," which Origen describes as the "phrases of Scripture"[15] or the "expressions and letters of the Gospels."[16] That is to say, by Origen's own account the Logos is primarily enfleshed through the words of

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[12] Ibid., 9.

[13] Ibid., 147.

[14] Ibid. In her examination of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Torjesen presents a concrete example of this doctrinal progression: "The stages of the soul's progress in knowledge correspond to Origen's own description of the progression in knowledge. The knowledge of the world through natural and moral philosophy forms the first stage. The beginning stage in the knowledge of the Logos is knowledge of his humanity, which means understanding the reasons for the incarnation. The knowledge of the soul, its nature, its cause (logos) and purpose belong to the next level, the knowledge of the intelligibles. The second stage in the knowledge of the Logos is the knowledge of his divinity, a knowledge of his pre-existences and cosmic functions. The next level is knowledge of the eternal, incorporeal and invisible; it includes knowledge of the eschatological function" (ibid., 95–96).

[15] *Philoc* 15.19.

[16] *ComMt* 12.38.

Scripture themselves in a distinctly non-referential manner.[17] We saw this most explicitly in our examination of the *epinoiai*, which span both the Old and New Testaments and which do not always directly refer to any doctrine, history, or poetic narrative.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, while it is appropriate to highlight the role of the historical events and the doctrines to which the text points, it is equally important to highlight the fact that for Origen, those doctrines and historical events are not themselves the ultimate goal. Rather, they end up pointing right back to the text, because the text itself is the *perpetual* incarnate Word of God. Reading about the history of Jesus, for example, does not grant one bodily access to the Jesus of first-century Palestine. Neither does recognizing a doctrinal truth about him. But for Origen, Christ is eternally present in, or as, the Scriptures, and the reader can encounter or even consume him by interpreting those Scriptures rightly. Indeed, in the Gospels themselves, where we might say that Christ speaks directly and without mediation, he is consistently turning his listeners back to the Scriptures. Why do this at all, when he stands before them in the flesh? We can perhaps anticipate Origen's answer: seeing Jesus' body and hearing his voice do not guarantee recognition of his identity, much less bring about eternal union with him. But when the reader or listener recognizes him in the ancient Scriptures, he stands "bodily" before them at all times.

Does Origen hold to a non-referential theory of meaning, then? Yes and no. No, on the one hand, because there is no question that he finds importance in the

[17] Thus, Behr too takes a position that stands in contrast to Torjesen's: "It is not possible to arrive at the spiritual sense of Scripture in any other way than through the words of scripture themselves. Thus, in his scriptural exegesis, Origen always begins with the literal or lexical sense (τὸ ἡρτόν), before exploring its spiritual sense." *Way to Nicaea*, 175.

histories, poetic dramas, objects, acts, and events "behind" the words, and that he takes the time to interpret them carefully, drawing the reader into grasping their significance. Yes, on the other hand, in that the words themselves are, to a certain extent, the true object of contemplation. They are the enfleshed Logos of God. If O'Keefe and Reno sum up the effect of a non-referential theory of meaning by stating that "the Bible absorbed [the Fathers'] attention rather than directing it elsewhere," there can be no question that Origen's work is a prime example. When, therefore, Crouzel argues that for Origen, Christianity is not really a "religion of the book," he is only correct to a certain degree. He writes, "In the strict sense of the term Christianity is not a religion of the Book; the book is secondary. The revelation is in the first place a person, Christ. He is, as the Johannine writings say, the Logos, the Word of God."[18] This is not untrue, and yet with all we have seen we might simultaneously affirm that, in a more profound sense, Origen's Christianity is more "of the book" than any other religion in existence, precisely because "the book" *is* "the person," to use Crouzel's terms. Or, to borrow once more the expression of Ignatius, "for me, the ancient scriptures are Jesus Christ."[19]

That said, what Crouzel is perhaps rightly trying to communicate is that it is not enough to say only that the "words are the true object of contemplation." To be more precise, Christ himself is the goal, and while the words give him flesh and make him known, they are ultimately still a means, specifically of encountering the one they reveal. In other words, when Origen reads and interprets the Scriptures, he approaches them as though he is encountering first the Christ who is revealed by

[18] Crouzel, *Origen*, 69.

[19] *Philadelphians* 8.2.

means of words, rather than a series of words which "point" or "refer" to Christ. John Behr draws a helpful distinction here in his description of New Testament Christological reflection:

> Thus, in the material which comes to be collected together as the canonical New Testament, reflection on Christ is an exegetical enterprise. But, it is very important to note that it is Christ who is being explained through the medium of Scripture, not Scripture itself that is being exegeted: the object is not to understand the "original meaning" of an ancient text, as in modern historical-critical scholarship, but to understand Christ himself, who, by being explained "according to the Scriptures" becomes the sole subject of Scripture throughout—he is the Word of God.[20]

The same can be said of much early Christian exegesis, and Origen's work is no exception. If for Origen, Scripture is Christ, then it is accurate to say that the primary task of the exegete is to explain Christ, by means of the words and phrases which give him flesh.

As we conclude we might wonder whether Origen is alone in his position. I do not believe he is. We have seen that prior to Origen, Ignatius reflected similar convictions (however briefly), and those who came after Origen and who were influenced by his work often conveyed identical beliefs in even more explicit terms. More than three centuries after Origen's death, for example, Maximus the Confessor would write the following in his *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*:

> The Logos of God is called flesh not only inasmuch as he became incarnate, but in another sense as well … When he draws near to men who cannot with the naked intellect come into contact with noetic realities in their naked state, he selects things which are familiar to them, combining together various stories, symbols, parables and dark sayings; and in this way he becomes flesh. Thus at the first encounter our intellect comes into contact not with the naked Logos but with the incarnate Logos, that is, with various sayings and stories. The incarnate Logos, though Logos by nature, is flesh in appearance. Hence most people think they see flesh and not the Logos, although in fact he is the Logos. The intellect—that is, the inner meaning—of Scripture is other than

[20] John Behr, "The Paschal Foundations of Christian Theology," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2001): 123.

> what it seems to most people. For the Logos becomes flesh in each of the recorded sayings.[21]

Maximus was of course no stranger to Origen's work, but then again, that was true of most major theologians in this period. Was Origen's perspective at all pervasive in the first centuries of the church's existence? Was it representative, or characteristic of the "patristic era" in any sense whatsoever? Only further scholarship can provide an answer.[22] But whatever the answer, it is safe to say that whether or not it began with Origen, this conviction certainly did not end with him. Like all things theological and exegetical, Origen's influence would span generations. Surely his vision of the Scriptures was no exception.

[21] *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*, 2.60; trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. 2 (New York: Faber and Faber, 1982), 151.

[22] For a very brief look at later thinkers who have echoed similar beliefs, including Augustine, Maximus, Rupert of Duetz, and Saint Bernard, see de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 391–96.

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